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# ELIJAH THE TISHBITE.

*You, O Jew,*

*By*

*DR. F. W. KRUMMACHER,*  
*Elberfeld.*



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## ELIJAH THE TISHBITE.

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### I.—ELIJAH'S FIRST APPEARANCE.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

It is a splendid picture which the Lord gives us of his true church here on earth, when, in the Song of Solomon, chap. iv, 4. he addresses her, "Thy neck is like the tower of David, builded with breast-works, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, and all manner of weapons of mighty men." He compares her to that strong tower which David built on Mount Zion. Thus stands also the Church of God, founded on a rock, and that rock is Christ, and his blood. She rests on God's power and word; the Three-One God that liveth for ever bears her in his hands. The gates of hell shall not prevail against her.

The tower of David was builded with breast-works, whereon hung the shields of his heroes by thousands. And when was the fortress of the Church of Jesus ever seen without defences? Many a thousand years has the infernal archer bent his bow against her, and shot at her with his fiery darts; she stands unharmed to this day. One buckler is here in the room of thousands. It covers her on all sides, and shines gloriously. Where is the lance that will pierce it? The name of that shield is Alpha and Omega. It defies the rust and decay of Time.

But David's tower was also hung with all manner of weapons of the mighty and the strong. There were the weapons of vanquished foes, hung out as trophies to be

made a show of openly ; and the arms of crowned warriors that fought for Zion, kept as an inspiring memory for children's children. The living tower of the Church of God is hung with like adornment for the spiritual eye. Behold there hanging on the battlements, the captured and broken weapons of many thousand vanquished strong ones. Here, the battle-sword of the murderer from the beginning, the old Dragon ; there the poisoned sting of Death, the grim king of terrors ; here the heavy artillery of the seven hills ; there the shattered spears and halberts of many false prophets and spirits of error, with their captured banners ; and from year to year the number multiplies of splintered lances and baffled adversaries, that the conqueror makes a show of openly.

But let us not pass over on this tower the swords of those heroes who stood for Zion in the field of battle, and to whom, as instruments and ministers of the living God, we owe the preservation of our light, and the upholding of the true sanctuary ; they gleam also, on the battlements, for the joy and comfort, and inspiring example of us, their remote posterity. Here the sword of a Noah, the preacher of righteousness ; there of a Moses, the much tried saint ; here the armour of Daniel ; there of Judas the Maccabee ; here of Paul, who fought the good fight ; there of Peter, surnamed a *Rock* ; here the helm and mail of Huss and Wicliff ; and there the jousting array of Luther, Calvin, and Zuingli, honest champions of the glory of God, trusty defenders of the rights of Zion.

And, behold ! among the swords of these spiritual heroes, there rises up one with startling lustre to the eye, one that has wrought wonders for God's kingdom and glory ; one that was two-edged and piercing, as any could be, in sore and evil times, and is yet stained with the blood and sweat of the fight. Whose is this noble weapon ? It is that of Elijah the Tishbite, a man mighty in word and deed and miracle, who burst forth like a fire, and whose word burnt like a torch, and who was so glorious and distinguished through grace, that when He who alone hath

glory, walked upon the earth, the Jews said, "It is Elias."

The life of Elijah, inwardly and outwardly, furnishes an inexhaustible source of varied edification and strengthening in the faith, and of encouragement and excitement to duty. We have resolved, therefore, to bring the history of this man of God, in a series of discourses, before your eyes. We shall accompany him, at one time to the streets of the capital, and the throne of the monarch; at another to the waste and lonely wilderness; now to the public, stormy theatre of his labours; now to the quiet chamber and the couch watered with tears; and learn of him how the Lord guides his people, and how his strength is perfected in weakness. May the spirit of the Lord of Lords smile in grace on these our meditations, and work so mightily by them, that many a weary heart may be refreshed, and many a feeble knee may be strengthened.

1 KINGS xvii. 1.

"And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word."

Thus begins the history of our prophet, and this brief and vivid opening carries us at once into the midst of his life. In his first appearance we have the whole man, as he lives and moves in heart and in action. The manner of his introduction on the stage of this history, is, indeed, remarkable. The preceding chapters have, as it were, dug through the wall, and disclosed to us the abominations of shame and horror, in which Israel, in that dismal age, lay wholly immersed. Ah! see how clouds and darkness lower over the whole land: images of Baal and Ashtaroath frown and leer at us on all sides, heathen temples and idolatrous altars cover the sacred soil, every hill smokes with impious sacrifices, every mountain re-echoes the accursed yells of a lying priesthood. The people drink up iniquity like water, and revel in shameless rites around the golden calves. Alas! alas! how is

the glory of Israel departed! how is Abraham's seed become so little discernible! the light so dark, the salt so savourless, the gold so dim! A dreary dark night on all sides, and nought but night, and nowhere one cheering little star in the heaven! Then does the history suddenly break out with the words, "AND ELIJAH SAID." As one fallen from heaven like a shot of lightning, as a gleaming thunderbolt hurled from Jehovah's hand, this man comes into the midst of the awful night-piece, without father, without mother, without descent, as Melchizedek. There he stands—in the midst of the desolation—with his God alone, in the wide world! Almost the only grain of salt in the universal corruption, the only leaven to leaven the whole lump; and that we may learn at once who he is, he begins his career almost like a god with an unheard-of deed of faith, by closing, in the name of his Lord, the heavens over Israel, and changing the firmament into iron and brass. God be praised! the night is no longer so dismal as before, for one man of God stands in the midst of it, and that makes it feel cheerful, as if the moon had risen over the scene.

Let us then meditate for a little on what is related in the present section of this man of God, and direct our attention to his name and external circumstances, his spiritual character, and the prophetic threatening with which he makes his appearance.

The man with whom we have to do is named *Elijah*. We hold it no idle play of fancy, to lay some weight, in the case of men of God, like Elijah, also upon the names they bear, and to inquire into their sense and import. In Israel, the giving of names was not left to the pleasure of man, but stood under the strictest control of God, so that the Lord not infrequently interfered by an express and immediate command, "Thus shall the child be called." Hence, there was no meaningless name, no name barren and devoid of real ground and import. Here there was wrapped up a precious promise or divine assurance, there a serious warning, a holy rule of life, or some



other memento which the subject of the name carried everywhere about with him. Sometimes, among the people of God, names indicated the character and prevailing disposition of a man, as the name Abel, nothingness, humility; sometimes his divine vocation, as the name Noah, a comforter; sometimes one's lot on earth, thus Mary, bitterness; sometimes the name sealed a promise, which was given to the man, as the name of the son of Terah, Abraham, *i. e.* father of many nations; sometimes it denoted the peculiar relation of the man to God, as the name Enoch, devoted; David, beloved; and so on. Thus, it is not to be wondered at that the mind of the people of Israel took each man's name within the ground of its more serious reflections, and was accustomed to ask and to inquire what the Lord meant and wished to be understood thereby. Names were to the people like tablets of remembrance, and like the bells on the priests' garments, reminding them of the Lord, and of his government, and furnishing occasion for a variety of salutary reflections. While, to the subject of the name it was a source of comfort and strength, of warning and encouragement—nay, to many a one like a cord by which he was drawn to God.

I am well aware that the man who directs a spiritual eye to such minutiae and details, as the import of names, is certain to be condemned before the tribunal of our rationally-enlightened public, and ridiculed as a narrow-minded, tasteless, and superstitious dealer in trifles. Alas! that even among believers, the faith in a God who numbers our hairs, and seeks to glorify himself in things the most minute, is practically become a rare jewel. But in whomsoever this child-like faith has yet its dwelling, who makes no distinction between great and small, and brings down the gracious God fairly with him into house and home, and sees Him sit by his side, under his vine and fig-tree, such a man is happy, and has much joy and peace, and divine delight everywhere, and wherever he goes he sees spiritual faces, and hears

divine voices, in names, in dreams, in thoughts, in incidents, and all around him there is the word of God, and the sound of his feet upon the mountains, and the Lord his God lisps and stammers with him in all manner of signs and images, trying now this and now that, as a mother with her suckling, and is not ashamed of the dialect of the nursery.

Our prophet's name is ELIJAH, that is, being interpreted, "My God of power," or "The Lord is my strength," a fine and noble name, and he bore it indeed and in truth. He was a man like you and me, nothing in himself, and yet his was the strength of God: he could do nothing, and yet deeds of omnipotence went forth from his hands. He lay in the dust, a worm, and yet took part in God's rule and sovereignty, a king, and had power to open and shut the heavens, to summon the dead to life, to doom the living to death, and to hold judgment on God's enemies. Thus might he justly be called Elijah, *i. e.* "God strengthens me." Nay, more, "God is himself my strength." Here is a difference. It is not the same thing my friends, when one merely says, God holds his shield before me, and when another can say in triumph, "God is my shield." Does he keep his shield before me, then nothing shall touch a hair of my head, and the evil before which I tremble, comes not nigh me. But is God my shield, then do I lift up my head amid the raging storm, as if the blue sky were over me, and rejoice in God, even amid the tumult, as if I were not there. Peter, when he came out free from prison and from chains, and all bolts burst in sunder before him, might shout for joy, as he went on, and say, "The shield of the Lord is round about me." Stephen, with his angel's countenance, under the fatal shower of stones from the hands of enemies, might cry out, "God is my shield." It betokens not equal progress in grace, when one says, "God comforts me," and when another can confess, "God is my comfort." Does the Lord comfort me, then my heart grows light and cheerful and gladsome, and there flows into the troubled

depths of my soul a stream of delightful joyfulness. But is God my comfort, then may my heart be torn and blighted, and wrapped in gloom, I faint not, and am stout and resolute of soul, and stand over my heart, and walk above the conflagration, and am still : in sense, I have nothing ; but have all in simple faith, in that God, who has once sworn to be my God ; in that faith I have it, which holds that in sure possession, which I neither see, nor taste, nor feel. It is not one and the same thing, my friends, when I say, " God gives me peace," and when another confesses, " God is my peace." Does God give me peace, then do the proud waves of my soul subside, the storm is blown over, and the fires are quenched, and a still soft murmur, as from the top of Horeb, breathes through my spirit, and the spices flow out in my garden. But if the tempest should still rage in the firmament of my soul, if it should lighten and thunder in the whole sky, and conscience be in wrath, the flesh in rebellion, the thoughts in self-accusing anguish, and the fiery darts of the wicked sweeping through my affrighted spirit, and if I am troubled on every side but not distressed, perplexed but not in despair, and borne aloft above the tumult in the chariot of faith, I embrace the wounds of my glorified Lord, and save myself by the thought, that He is the God, " yea and amen," keeping covenant to a thousand generations, and lay up the poor tempest-tossed bark of my soul in the haven of faith in free grace, and anchor under the rocky shelter of the immoveable promises,—then is the Lord my peace.

Just so is it with the expressions, " God strengthens me," and " God is my strength." If God strengthens me, then am I something by his grace, and find a divine power in myself, through which I can do something, and feel myself armed and girt about with a courageous and joyful spirit, and laugh at walls and bulwarks ; and have a free path and a clear field, and fear nothing. But, if sensible that I am nothing, and feeling only nothingness and weakness in my soul, and trembling at the sight of

the danger that surrounds me, and at the mountains of difficulty that rise to heaven before me, I yet, though nature quails, go calmly forward, hoping against reason and sense, and even hope, in simple faith on Him who is eternally near, who will go with me, and to whom it is a light thing to beat down with a word the ocean's waves, and to thrash the mountains so that they shall become a plain; and if I walk by faith on the waves of nature's terror, without courage a hero, in weakness strong, in fainting valiant, then can I exult, and say, "God is my strength," and my feet are set upon a rock. What a miracle is this faith, which includes omnipotence, which unites God and a worm in one being, and puts the sceptre of the Almighty in the hands of a babe.

Elijah could not claim much distinction from birth, station, or the place of his nativity. He was born, as we see from the text, among the mountains of Gilead, beyond Jordan, a country rich indeed, in all manner of fruits and herbs, balms and spices, but mostly peopled with blinded heathens, and covered with the idolatrous abominations of the Amorites. It lay not far from the spot where the devil afterwards entered into the swine, and we may easily conceive no Jew thought, unless from the strongest necessity, of making his home among these mountains. It may have been a poor household, perhaps a wretched banished Jewish family, in which the child Elijah was born and brought up. His birth-place, Thisbe, was, indeed, no other than an obscure and sorry mountain village, and the lad could know very little of schools, universities, and the great world. But this is no other than the manner of our God, from the times of old, to take the instruments of a great work much rather out of the dust, than from off the throne, that it may be seen how all depends on his choice, and made manifest that flesh and blood hath not accomplished this or that, but that the glory of it is His alone. For this reason, he was then preparing in Gilead the balm by which the health of the daughter of Zicn should be recovered, and rearing

up for himself in the bloody den of the Amorites' country, the man, with whom, as with a hammer, he should dash altars in pieces, do judgment upon kings, and cut off the priests of Baal. The term "TISHBITE," when translated, means "*Converter*," and how strikingly does this name agree with the whole life and peculiar vocation of our prophet. Of the youth of Elijah and his earlier history we know nothing; only there is an old legend, which, though fabulous, is yet striking, to the following effect:—On the birth of Elijah, his father, Soliach, is said to have seen a vision, in which a number of men dressed in white and shining garments appeared to stand round the child, and then wrapped him up, with every token of reverence, in swaddling bands of fire, and fed him with blazing flames. The priests are said to have interpreted the vision thus:—That the family of Elijah should come to great distinction, and that he himself should judge Israel with the fire of his mouth. And what prediction was ever more exactly fulfilled!

Elijah appears on the theatre of our history with a word of faith and power, "And Elijah the Tishbite said." And where does he utter it, and to whom, and when? Hark! it is the voice of one crying in the wilderness. Since the death of Solomon, evil had burst in on Israel, irresistible as on eagle's wings; and there was now no barrier strong enough to stem the torrent of universal corruption. The despotic language of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, on ascending the throne, that if his father had scourged the people with whips, he should chastise them with scorpions, excited disaffection, and led to the revolt of ten tribes, which renounced their allegiance, constituted themselves an independent kingdom, and formally elected Jeroboam, his general, to be their king. Only the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained subject to the new king, and, after him, to the royal house of David, and formed henceforth the kingdom of Judah, while the ten revolted tribes styled themselves the kingdom of Israel.

The kings of Judah, who possessed the south of the promised land, resided at Jerusalem, on Mount Zion. The kings of Israel, whose realm included the northern parts, had their residence in the hill-fortress of Thirza, and afterwards in the city of Samaria. Both kingdoms continued at perpetual feud with each other; but that was not the worst evil. Many thousand times worse was the internal disorder. Rehoboam began his reign by introducing, from political motives, a new form of worship. He was afraid that if the people continued in connection with the Temple and the worship of God at Jerusalem, they would, bye and bye, decline from their allegiance to him, and return to the crown of David. He set up golden calves, therefore, in imitation of the cherubim of the Temple, changed the time of certain festivals, and elected priests from all the tribes of the people indiscriminately, without restricting himself to the tribe of Levi. This unlawful worship of God became open idolatry, when, in the year 900 before the birth of Christ, king Ahab, that feeble, and characterless slave of his bloodthirsty wife Jezebel, ascended the throne of Israel. Then it was at the instigation of this ungodly heathen woman of Sidon, that the worship of Baal was formally introduced as the national religion, and the fire and sword of persecution let loose against the worshippers of the true God. Alas, for the sad and evil time which then broke in, the dark night which brooded over the land, the horror and abomination which everywhere came to the light of day! Gloomy idol-temples rose up in all quarters, profane altars, red with the blood of slaughtered prophets and children of God, did despite to the Most High, and provoked Him to wrath and vengeance. The most crying injustice sat upon the throne, the maddest caprice was exalted to rules of government and policy. And every hill and mountain, wood and grove, house and hut, was polluted with the most shocking, licentious, and shameless rites and horrors of heathenism. The devil appeared to have transferred

his residence from hell to earth, and was striving to darken the sun of heaven with the smoke and vapour of the most horrible idolatry.

And now behold ! this is the time, these the circumstances in which Elijah, the man of God, like a portrait in a dark frame, meets our view. The kingdom of Ahab and Jezebel is the dark theatre on which he enters in God's name, and where we shall behold his efforts ; and a despotic prince, a bloodthirsty tyranness, a people lost to reason, and a multitude of ambitious and lying priests form the field of labour where he is to plough and sow. How will the man of God acquit himself among so crooked and perverse a generation ? What fortunes shall he encounter on this stormy sea ? How will he find his way over such walls, mountains, and bulwarks ? All this we shall discover in the sequel, and find ourselves every moment constrained, with strengthened faith and joyful hearts, to exclaim, " The Lord, he is God ! the Lord, he is God ! "

II.—So much, by way of introduction, for Elijah's external position. Let us now glance at his spiritual character, and relation to God. This he indicates himself in the words of our text, when he says, " As the Lord God of Israel liveth, *before whom I stand.*" Elijah stood before the God of Israel ; that was his spiritual bent and attitude, and the character of his inward life. " My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest."—Exod. xxxiii. 14. Knowest thou the living rock that followed the people through the desert to Canaan, and that prince over the army of the Lord, who appeared with a drawn sword to Joshua at Jordan, and was himself the sword of his victories, and the shield of his help.—Josh. v. 13-15. Dost thou indeed know him ? Christ is his name. He is the Lord, the God of Israel. Before him stand the thousand times ten thousand ; before him the angels, whom he makes spirits, the ministers whom he makes a flame of fire : before him stood Elijah.

“ Happy are thy people, and happy are those thy servants that stand continually before thee.” So spake the queen of Sheba to Solomon.—1 Kings x. 8. But a greater than Solomon is here ; and how much happier the servants who stand in the presence of the God of Israel ! But no one stands before Him in his own strength. Those whom he permits to stand in his presence, stand on his footing, in his strength, in his righteousness and beauty. For he bears an iron sceptre, and with it he beats down all who are presumptuous enough to appear before him on their own merits, to behold him in their own strength, to seek to lift up the head before him in their own righteousness. This is what he cannot bear. But to the worm in the dust, to the poor sinner, emptied of pride, that lies in his blood, he says, “ Get thee up : stand before me, behold my face with comfort, and be not afraid.” He that desires to *stand* before him, and to lift up the head in his presence, must first have *lain* prostrate before him in the dust, in the writhings of conviction and repentance. How often may Elijah have lain on the earth, among the mountains of Gilead ! how many tears may he have shed in lonely caves and holes of the rocks, ere he could say, “ As the Lord liveth, the God of Israel, before whom I *stand*.” Elijah was a man reconciled to God through Christ Jesus, the Messiah, and clothed with his righteousness. All this lies in his words, “ I stand before the Lord, the God of Israel ;” all this is attested by the fact, that he it was whom Christ, about a thousand years later, deemed worthy to be, with Moses, a witness of his transfiguration on Mount Tabor.

But this standing before the Lord, implies something yet more than the state of reconciliation to God in general. It denotes a farther and special relation to God. In this sense I stand before the Lord when it is my highest desire to know the will of the Lord perfectly, and when, from one moment to another, I can do nothing but strive to please him, and seek his glory. When I keep my eyes awake, and hold them at their post, as it



were, to discover the signals of my king, and quicken the ears of my mind, to perceive his voice and commands, within me and without me, and when I long for the least of his intimations, that I may run in the way of his commandments—then it is that I stand before the Lord. If this be my predominant character, I then belong to the class of Christians who have been called *apostolical*, and who rejoice in outward effort, rather than in still contemplation. Elijah, like all God's children, had his part in both; but his prevailing disposition was that which he himself expresses in the text. He stood before the Lord. To be an instrument of the will of God, for the hallowing and glorifying of his name, that was his fervent desire. He could say alike of spiritual eye and ear, as the watchman in Isaiah, "Lord, I stand continually upon the watch-tower in the day-time; and I am set in my ward whole nights."—Isa. xxi. 8. His life was a hearkening to God's voice. He sought it in thunder and in storm, as well as in the still small voice. He listened to it in all the turns of his life, as well as in the changing moods of sentiment; and when he went forth a wanderer, his wandering was still a standing and a waiting; his way still led under the open canopy; in the presence of his eternal king he spent his days; and his watchword was, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." Such was Elijah through the grace of God. Thus he stood before "the Lord, the God of Israel."

III.—Let us now direct our eyes to Samaria, the idolatrous city. There stands the man of God in the midst of his enemies, fronting the tyrant Ahab, and he opens his mouth free and fearless in his God, and exclaims, so that the ears of all tingle, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew or rain these years, but according to my word." Elijah! what art thou doing? What a perilous venture! Is not this to put the honour of God at stake? Will they not ridicule him and thee also, if thy prediction be slow of accomplish-

ment? O, Elijah has no such fear. He knows who will maintain his cause.

But how could Elijah make such announcement? Full of holy zeal for the honour of his God, he was inwardly persuaded that such suffering and penal judgment on the darkened land might melt the hardness of their hearts, and make the name of the Lord once more glorious in their eyes. He had laid the matter before the Lord, as James assures us in the end of his epistle,—chap. v. 17. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain. And Amen! was the answer from above in his soul. Amen! be it so; into thy hands it is given to shut up and to open heaven. Elijah took this Amen of the living God, as a sword in his hand. Resting on this Amen, he announced the drought, with divine infallibility. All nature in Samaria seemed to shake the head at it, and to laugh the threatening to scorn. The luxuriant pastures and meadows, and the well-watered seats of springs, cried everywhere to each other, “Elijah, in this you shall not succeed!” and many hundreds of bubbling fountains, and brooks, flowing through the land, and the vapoury hills that form and attract the clouds, all seemed to have joined in one to falsify his word. But Elijah was not mistaken. He held the Amen of his God in the hand of faith, and what cared he for nature, probability, and reason. He silenced the *Nay!* of fountains, brooks, and clouds, with his *Yea!* and where all promised the bloom of verdure, his words were, As the Lord liveth, there shall be a drought. Believe thou in like manner in the *amen*, which God has once given thee in thy heart, to seal thy gracious state, and thy adoption. Be not thou deceived, either by thy questioning nature, or by the weakness of thy flesh, or by thy over-scrupulous conscience, or by the devil, the spirit that always gainsayeth. Keep thyself fixed in faith on the divine amen once granted thee, and abide by it, and say, “As the Lord the God of Israel liveth and endureth for ever, nothing shall con-

denn me, or separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus."

"As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." Elijah said it, and straightway the heavens and the earth changed their appearance. The heaven became as iron and brass, and its moisture was stayed. The word of the prophet fell like a fever upon the bowels of the earth, parching and burning, and all that was fresh and green grew languid and drooping, and every bubbling spring and flowing brook was dried up, and all that had breath lay gasping and pining on the ground. For three years and a half there fell neither rain nor dew—so mightily did the word of one feeble man work, but of a man who stood in covenant and harmony of will with the Omnipotent.

We conclude. O my flock, blessed of the Lord, verily, verily I say unto you, it shall not be more tolerable for you than for Samaria and Israel, if the high places in your hearts are not speedily removed, the groves cut down, and the idols broken in pieces, before which even you (alas! that it should still be true of the majority) more secretly or more openly bow the knee. Ah, is it so, that the heaven has already begun to close over us? How sparingly falls the dew of the spirit, how few are raised from death, and how long is it since the sound of abundance of heavenly rain was heard in our vale.\* How is this? Perhaps there is an Elijah come forth among us, with his word, "As the Lord liveth, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years." Or, does Elijah sleep, forgetting to loose again what he has bound? Church of God, little flock of Israel, people of his profession, thou art Elijah! Thy tongue is also made to call forth clouds and rain, and is as a rod to break the brazen doors in sunder. Ah, sleep not! for "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."—James v. 16. Go, pray, pray for dew and rain upon the thirsty ground, and

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\* The vale of Barmen, where the author then resided.

then announce it from the amen of thy heart, The drought will soon be at an end : get thee up, eat and drink, and be joyful, for there is a sound of abundance of rain. May God grant it in his grace. Amen !

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## II.—ELIJAH AT THE BROOK CHERITH.

IN those moments of alarm and peril, when Israel stood on the shore of the Red Sea, not knowing which way to turn, while before them the deep waters roared, behind them the enraged Egyptians rushed on with chariots and horsemen, and on both sides impassable cliffs rose abruptly like walls on high, and made all flight impossible, the Lord appeared to Moses, and said, “Wherefore criest thou unto me ? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward.”—Exod. xiv. 15.

Great must have been the surprise of the man of God at this command, and when the people also were apprised of it, their surprise and astonishment must have been still greater. There had been in the prophet's mouth neither crying nor sighing : on the contrary, he appeared strong and resolved, and was even zealously concerned to comfort and support the people with all his might, and to keep before their minds the promises, with which the God-amen, had so solemnly engaged and sworn to be their shield and defence. “Fear ye not,” he cried through all their ranks, “stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will show to you to-day : for the Egyptians, whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.”—Exod. xiv. 13, 14. And, as he thus cried through the ranks, in appearance so strong, so heroic, and so joyful in his God, the word came from the Lord, “Moses, why criest thou unto me ?”

Moses alone was in a situation to comprehend that divine call. And comprehend it he did. In his mouth, there had indeed been no cry, but a cry all the more in his heart, and though his look was bold, and valiant, and

undismayed, as that of a young hero, for the people's sake, that they might not despair, alas! in the mind of the man of God, all looked quite otherwise. *There* all was trouble and extremity, perplexity and terror. His faith struggled in violent conflict with the billows of doubt, which impetuously stormed and bore in upon him, and threatened to bury him in their fury; and the promises of his God, though he seemed to have them as a rock under his feet, and a sceptre in his right hand, fell, alas! upon his soul only like the moon-beams on the ruffled bosom of a lake, broken, quivering, and glancing to and fro, without being able to form a settled image. The Lord saw clearly the prophet's struggle, and before Moses found time to make his plaint to God, and to cry out to him, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief," the Lord had, with tender care, resolved to calm the storm in the prophet's breast, and he calmed it with the words, "Why criest thou to me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward."

We have a God, my friends, who is at home in the depths of our hearts, and whose eyes run incessantly like a flame of fire through the chambers of our soul, and descend to the darkest recess of our being. Before we have disclosed and laid before him our want and misery, he takes measures to help and heal us, and regards our misery as if it were a prayer, and hears not us, but our distress. At all times he knows perfectly, and far better than we know ourselves, what is good and profitable and needful for his children, and assuredly he never acts otherwise than they themselves would pray that he should deal with them, could they but see so clearly into their spiritual necessities as he sees into them. But we know only in rare cases, what is for our good, and therefore the ways by which God leads us, are, for the most part, dark and perplexing, just because the *why* and the *wherefore* are hid from our view. But how hard, how painful, and how aimless soever his dealings toward us may now and then appear, they are in truth, nothing else than the actual

hearing, if not of our expressed prayers, yet of our misery, and of our unknown and unfelt wants. They are all, without exception, ways of mercy, and their simple end is health and salvation.

“Moses! why criest thou to me? speak to the children of Israel, that they go forward.” Thus spake the Lord. And what a mandate! “Lord! seest thou not the sea at our feet, how fearfully it rages?” “Go forward.” “Lord! can our feet walk upon the billows, and pass over the abyss?” “Go forward.” “Lord, Lord! where is the bridge, then, that thou hast raised, or the boats of passage? Wilt thou, Lord, have thy people lost in the wild waters, and Egypt blaspheme thy name?” “Say I not that ye go forward?” speaks the Almighty; but yet he touches no billow, to calm and smooth it, nor dries up the bottom of the sea, but lets it heave and storm at will; and, pointing towards the wild tumult, he speaks, “Go forward, go forward!” They must venture upon his word; they must believe before they see, and march forward upon trust. They do venture; and behold, in the moment when they make ready to go forward in the name of their God, and to tread upon the raging element, then struck by the rod of the prophet, the waves separate and divide, and tower up like a wall on their right hand and their left, and in the midst there is a dry passage, and Israel joyfully marches through.

Thus does our gracious God work. We must venture upon his word, and truly there is no hazard in all that we venture in his name; and where his command is, “Forward!” be it into fire, or storm, or sea, let us advance with confidence, and the issue shall be glorious. Truths like these of the most consolatory nature, we shall find to-day confirmed, as we now proceed with the history of our prophet.

1 KINGS xvii. 2—6.

“And the word of the Lord came unto him saying, Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And it shall be that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee

there. So he went, and did according unto the word of the Lord ; for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening, and he drank of the brook."

Here is a cool refreshing spring opened in our history for all who have to follow Elijah's footsteps, and to bear Elijah's cross. Hither, then, all that dwell in the desert, and mourn amid the shade and gloom of the wilderness ! Bring with you vessels for the hidden manna ; draw and drink abundantly that your hunger and sadness may cease.

We shall at present direct our attention, I. to Elijah's perplexity ; II. God's command ; III. the prophet's faith ; IV. the reward of his faith.

I. Elijah, burning with zeal for the honour of Him whom he served, had made his prayer to the Lord, " Lord, it is time. Break forth, and save the honour of thy name. For the iniquity of the people is full ; and there is no end of their wickedness. Show that thou, Lord, art God indeed, and smite the land with thy judgments, that Samaria may learn that thine is the kingdom, and that Thirza may bow at thy feet." Thus prayed Elijah ; and the Almighty said, " Amen ; be judgment given into thy hand. Shut up the heaven for years, and command the clouds to become iron and brass, and shed down neither dew nor rain." And Elijah, joyful in God, broke forth as a fire, flew to Samaria, burst through the guards and gates of the royal palace, like another king, and stopped not till he had reached the tyrant's throne. There, in the sight of Ahab and his crowd of minions, he opens his mouth, and calls aloud, so that soon the sound filled all the land, and made all ears to tingle, " There shall be neither rain nor dew these years, but according to my word."

The word was spoken in God's name, in holy burning zeal, and the judgment immediately broke forth. Dreadful harbingers came first ; then the full plague. All-consuming, like the flaming eye of the God of vengeance, the sun glared from heaven upon the earth ; its rays were changed into arrows of destruction and of death ; the

air was parched and sultry, and carried up, like a lawless sea of fire, every streamlet from its bed, and every fountain from its source. Plants and trees dropped their leaves, and died ; the cattle crept groaning over the parched up meadows, the wild beasts moaned in the forests, the dearth rose to the highest, and it was not long till famine reigned throughout the land, giving "cleanness of teeth," and changing houses and fields into scenes of mourning and woe.

Where is now Elijah ? Where should he be ? He shares the common lot. No angel came to rescue him ; no chariot of fire has borne him upward. There he stands with the sinners on the same scene of judgment, to all appearance himself exposed to the vengeance which he had called down, and obnoxious to famine and destruction with the ungodly. There he stands, and must groan and languish like the rest, threatened by the same danger, and besides, execrated by a whole people, vilified, persecuted, and devoted to death. It seems as if he were about to share Samson's fate, who tore down the pillars of the temple of Dagon, and was buried with the Philistines in the same ruin. Truly it was no light task, in such a situation and amid such circumstances, to hold fast his faith. What must have been the struggle of his inmost soul, in view of the universal suffering around him, and of his own dangers ? How often may natural pity, at one time, natural fear and despondency at another, have cried within him, "Elijah, why hast thou prayed for this ?" Yes, it is not difficult to imagine in what perplexity and confusion the prophet must have found himself. His joy and triumph were by this time well nigh over, and no other stay was left than simple faith in the amen of his God, and the conviction, "I have acted in God's name, and he will see to the issue."

Experiences like those which Elijah must now have passed through, are not uncommon in the kingdom of God. Almost every Christian meets with something like this in his own history, in one form or other. They are



pressed in spirit to do or utter this or that particular thing : the impulse is strong, the inward call is irresistible. Overflowing with holy zeal, borne away by a mighty spirit of triumph, and losing all self-control, the man takes his course like a ship with spread sails, for which the wind is too strong ; and before time has been found for reflection and weighing of the consequences, the step is taken, the word is uttered. Then, all at once, he is made aware what he has risked ; he sees himself thrown forward into a region of difficulties and dangers, which seem far to surpass the measure of our common faith and ability ; he has, with Peter, stepped down upon the open sea, the wind howls frightfully, the waves threaten him with destruction : gladly would he retrace his steps, but the way of return is barred, and retreat can no more be thought of, however he may repent of his rashness. The elated zeal which overcame us is burnt to the socket, the soul cries in despair, " Lord, save us : we perish ! "

This was the case, for example, with many of the admirable men who were recently compelled to leave their country for their religion. In opposition to the spirit of worldly power and greatness, they preached to their flocks, the simple Gospel, repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. Herein lay sufficient danger for them, which they still, however, in some measure avoided, as they prudently refrained from attacking the national church, and denouncing the unchristian inroads of the government on its liberties. But before they were aware, their lips were opened in their pulpits by Another, so that they were constrained, all at once, to utter what they would not, and, borne away by holy zeal, to disclose the danger which threatened the ruin of the national church. Every thing was then exposed without fear or reserve, so that the ears of the people tingled. Uzziah was denounced for his unpardonable presumption in seeking to unite the sword and the censer in the same hand. They could no longer keep silence respecting the dark design of reducing the church of Christ to heathenism :

they boldly proclaimed that nothing else was intended than wickedly to steal away the ark of the covenant, and to smuggle the images of false doctrine and precept into the sanctuary. The complaint was openly made to God, that the churches had been robbed of that treasure, the Heidelberg Catechism, while books inspired by the spirit of antichrist had been forced on masters and scholars in its stead ; and, that the last pillars of their ancient ecclesiastical constitution were shaken, in order to convert the church of Christ into a political institution. Many of the estimable preachers so far forgot themselves, and gave themselves up so entirely to the spirit of God, that they publicly declared that they could not reconcile it with their conscience to adhere to such a church any longer.

The word was spoken : the spark was thrown into the mine ; who could recal it ? The people were in the greatest excitement : many went directly after sermon to their teachers and declared to them their resolution to separate from such a church ; others wavered, and were much perplexed. The majority vented their feelings in curses, revilings, and threatenings to stone these fearless witnesses, and the arm of civil power fell upon them in deposition, imprisonment, and exile. The worthy men had not thought of such consequences. Consternation came upon them like an armed man. The cheerful zeal which inspired them in their pulpits, and in the ardour of which they regarded only God and his cause—not themselves and their own worldly prospects—was soon all but extinguished in the flood of these tribulations, so that they could only say, “ Had we foreseen the consequences, we had rather have kept silence ; ” and nothing was left them but the conviction, “ We have been directed of God ; our own wisdom would have acted otherwise.” And now this faith in God is the pilgrim’s staff on which they still to this day, though now and then with a sigh for the past, wander about, without fear or sadness, in a strange land. It has helped them gloriously, and will never fail.

What befell these men on a large scale, a thousand

Christians experience on a smaller, in various ways. One, under the influence of the spirit of love, confidently entrusts his whole property, for Christ's sake, to a brother in embarrassment; but when he comes to reflection, and sees the consequences of this step disclose themselves in his own want, or that of his children, or in other perplexities, his joy is gone, and his heart is terrified. Another, carried away by holy zeal, will, after long reserve, come forth at length before his friends and family, with an open and joyful confession of Christ crucified, or with an earnest call to repentance. But no sooner is the deed done, and he learns what a fire of resentment he has kindled around him, and how the peace of his own household is broken, than his zeal is cooled, and he is wretchedly cast down. What, then, is he to do? Retract his confession? This, for his Lord's sake, he cannot, dare not do: he must let the fire burn. Another is moved, in the confidence of his heart, to pray to God for still nearer communion with Himself, and if this cannot be realized in the way of peace, that he would send tribulation. The trials come, the waters of tribulation roll over him; but, alas! the tribulation, when it is at hand, seems no more joyous, but grievous. The joyful frame in which he prayed is overcast, he repents him of his petition, and his heart is filled with repining and sorrow.

Are we, then, to take nothing in hand without first calculating the consequences? I reply, where it is possible to sit down before hand and count the cost, let us by all means do it. But let whoso can do it, where it is impossible. We cannot make this rule of calculation universal. The lion roars, and who shall not fear? The Lord God speaks, and who shall not prophecy? The tide rushes on, who shall stay it? The love of Christ constrains, who shall restrain it? The fire bursts forth, who shall quench it? Necessity has here no law; and, follow what will from discharge of duty, this I know, "God has constrained me, and I have been constrained; of Him it is, and not of

the flesh." With this faith much is already overcome. On this you may rely with confidence, that if ever God's arm is stretched forth to help any, it is those who, in obedience to his call, "Come hither," have cheerfully and without consulting with flesh and blood, stepped down and ventured at his bidding on the stormy waves. This we shall learn from the example of the prophet.

II. Elijah remained not long in this solitary situation, left to the musings of his heavy heart. When he was quite without counsel, the counsellor appeared; when he saw no way of escape, the gates opened of their own accord. This is God's procedure. "The word of the Lord," it is said, "came to him." How welcome a voice in a land of desolation and woe! for, if the word of the Lord visit us, this is no other than God's eternal love and mercy, since the word of the Lord is Christ. Nothing is more blessed at all times than to be visited and inwardly addressed by Christ. But it is most of all blissful and desirable when we have begun some enterprise in his name; and behold! we have thereby kindled a fire that threatens to devour us and our associates; when we have, at his bidding, ventured upon a step, whose consequences are such as to confound us, and make us stand in doubt whether that step has been taken with God's will and at his command. This uncertainty is then indescribably painful, and carries our distress and perplexity to the utmost. And how gladly do we welcome Him when he, in such circumstances, unexpectedly knocks again at our door, and causes us to hear the sweetness of his voice; when he, in any way whatever, gives us to understand that we had acted rightly, and by some farther dealing towards us, leaves us no more in doubt of his full approval of our conduct; and, either by some visible outward relief, or an inward testimony of grace and assurance of adoption, gives us an unambiguous token that he is not angry with us, but regards us with love, and will perfect that which con-

cerneth us. Ah, *this* joy surpasses all other joy, and though the outward trouble may remain as it was, this joy makes the heart strong to bear it.

“The word of the Lord came to Elijah,” it is said. Not that there was any word of Elijah to Jehovah. No, he is gracious enough to visit his children uninvited, to anticipate their request with his counsel. He does not always wait for their prayers. It does not always happen as the proverb says, that “Want teaches men to pray.” Alas ! how great is the confusion often when the waters of affliction suddenly roll over our heads, or imminent dangers compass us about. One looks to the winds, another to the waves. One seizes the rudder of human strength, another, the frail anchor of human hope ; but, “Master, awake, we perish !” is forgotten by all ; or, if the Lord is thought of, there is either a want of faith or of filial courage and confidence, and scarcely a step is taken to seek the Lord. How justly might he be offended at this, and leave us to suffer for it. But no ; he chooses rather to shame his children through love, and to heap coals of fire upon their heads. Even when uncalled, he visits them, and breaks in upon them not unfrequently with light and salvation, where his presence was not only not desired, but where he had been affronted by unbelief. These visits of the Lord, however, you may rest assured of it, may well humble and abase us, melt our hearts, and stop our mouths, so that we have not a word to say for shame and confusion of face. His pure unmerited grace strikes then in full splendour fairly on our eyes ; there is nothing that one can regard as in the least a concurring cause of the manifestation of good, no prayer, no sigh, no upward look unto the Lord, not even a thought of him ; so that we can only cast our eyes downwards and kiss the feet of our Lord, and exclaim, “This is pure, free grace !” A salutary mortification this of our inward pride, a precious lesson that “it is not of him that willeth, or of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.”

To return to our narrative. The Lord had come to the

prophet not only to calm his fears, but to take him out of the way of danger. This was, however, to happen in such a way as might equally glorify the name of the Lord, and teach the prophet a salutary lesson of faith. Hence he was carried away on no cloud or chariot of fire. Hence he was not borne through the sky, nor did a host of angels hover round him. In such a deliverance there would have been little room for faith. God pointed out a different path, "Get thee hence, and turn eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And it shall be that thou shalt drink of the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there." A singular direction, as it seems a step from one evil into many. But know ye what the Lord said to Manoah, "Wherefore askest thou after my name, seeing it is *wonderful*."—Judges xiii. 18. Yes, *wonderful* is his name, and his way, "and his paths are in the deep waters."

You ask whether the Lord still shows his children the path of duty, as he did the prophets in times of old. Undoubtedly; not indeed with an audible voice, but nevertheless with the same certainty and distinctness. This he does generally by shutting and barring up all other ways and leaving only one open to us. This is then, in effect, to say "Thus shall ye go, and turn neither to the right hand nor to the left." Does he lead us by a guidance from within? Then he secretly suggests to us the course we should follow, and makes all farther choice impossible. Should we strive to take another direction than that inwardly suggested, our peace is immediately disturbed, and such a storm arises in the soul that we must retrace our steps. Does he lead us by outward guidance? Then he brings us into such circumstances and relations that we have only one way to fall back upon; as we see all others barred before us by outward providences. The ways which our Lord thus points out to us are, in general, like those of Elijah, specially selected for the trial of our faith and the crucifixion of our old man. Only follow on with confidence; for, as

often as the Lord says to one of his children, "Get thee hence, and hide thyself in the wilderness of Jordan, and by the brook Cherith," he adds also, aloud or in a whisper in the depths of his heart, "and the ravens shall feed thee there." Every way which he points out has its own promise; and we may dismiss all alarm so soon as we know for certain that the way is of God's direction.

III. How then did Elijah receive the command of his God? There was something in him, as in every other, to which this direction of the Lord ran directly counter, and that could not reconcile itself to the divine procedure. His old man was ready with a multitude of objections. How could it please him that, instead of a more speedy and marvellous deliverance, he should be required to retire on foot like an ordinary person? Why he was directed to proceed on the morrow into the land of Judea, that shared in the judgment of Samaria, he could not see. Nor could it at all cheer him to be directed to the lonely wilderness and the brook Cherith, in a gloomy and uninhabited forest. That he should there be secure from the machinations of Ahab and his enemies, or that the waters there also should not be dried up in the general drought, was to him very questionable. And then, his being fed by ravens, those unclean and ravenous creatures; that was to him far from inviting in itself, as it lay beyond the horizon of his reason and experience; so that he could have wept at the prospect, or, with Sarah, have laughed in his heart. But, however much nature might oppose, or the old man object and murmur, they were thwarted, beat down, and crucified. For there was also another principle in Elijah, which condemned his own nature, and acquiesced in the will of God.

This, however, is far from saying that Elijah could not, with fervency of joy, render thanks for the command which he had received, and exult in it with heartfelt triumph. Perhaps his mind was a good deal troubled and depressed with it, but still confident, and firm in faith which doubted

not at that which it did not see. "Is it the command of God," he might think, "then it is holy, and just, and good. God's commissions to his children, what are they but hidden promises? Since he hath told me, 'Get thee from hence,' I know well that he will make a path for me, help me to the end, and shield me by the way. For he deceives no one. No serpent shall sting me, no lion shall devour me, for I walk on the Lord's errand. Since he commands me, 'Turn thee eastward,' I am assured that, though I seem to be moving westward, the morn shall rise over my head. Since he commands me to hide myself by the brook Cherith, which is before Jordan, the brook Cherith must be for me a safe retreat, even if it flowed not in the wilderness, but through the palace of Samaria. I shall drink of the brook: he says it, and this is warrant and security enough that the sun will be enjoined not to touch this brook with his scorching rays." Thus thought the prophet; and then he would proceed farther, "God's promises are, in substance, injunctions, the fulfilling of which he unalterably imposes on himself. Has he said, 'I will do this or that for thee,' he *must* needs bring it to pass for his own name's sake. Thus, the ravens shall certainly come, and must sooner die of hunger themselves than allow me to want." Thus spoke Elijah with himself in his heart. And then he took the word of the Lord into the hand of faith, as the staff of his pilgrimage, and journeyed forwards; and, whenever he grew weary, he leaned upon this staff, and his strength revived; and when danger threatened him by the way, in view of this staff he was not afraid. Have you such a staff in your hands, my dear brethren? Are you assured, with Elijah, that the path you tread has been pointed out to you by God; and has any divine promise been received by you and made your own—either a particular promise, or a general one like this? "Fear not, for I have redeemed thee. When thou passest through the waters, they shall not overflow thee."—Isaiah xliii. 1, 2. Oh, is it not true that all is then well, and sure, and certain?



Behold, then, our prophet, the lonely wanderer, as he sets forth on his journey ! It seems as if we heard the firm tread of his footsteps echo in our ear, while we read that " he went and did according to the word of the Lord ; for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan."

IV. Come with me, and let us visit this man of God in his new abode. He has just arrived. A desert tract, not far from the Jordan, is spread out before our eyes. A dull silence reigns over the wild, broken only by the cry of the lonely bittern ; while, amid heath and juniper, the ostrich broods, and no one disturbs her repose. No path is to be seen, no track of human footsteps—all is forsaken, lonely, and desolate. Let us cross through, and approach the Jordan. Yonder lies our path, where the naked rocks rise abruptly to heaven, and the woods hang so dark around. Pass now through this thicket, and now through this narrow gorge, and then down into the tangled dell, where the brook gurgles along, and forces its way from rock to rock. Behold, there sits the man of God ; here is his house ; the blue heaven, his roof ; the bare rocks, his walls ; his seat, the mossy stone ; the shady wood, his bed-chamber ; his couch, the green grass ; and his company, the murmuring brook, and the cawing ravens above him in the trees. There he sits in his hairy mantle, silent and ruminating ; and as often as the loneliness is ready to overcome him, or the hiss of adders near him, and the roar of lions in the distance to alarm him, he says within himself, " I sit here at God's bidding ; and his footsteps are among these rocks ;" and thus he regains courage and hope through faith. And now Elijah has had his home here for a whole year. It sounds incredible, and even awful. But how would you be astounded to learn, from Elijah's own assurance, that he had, through the whole lengthened period, known nothing of tedium ; and that his solitude had become from day to day less solitary, nay more lively and cheerful. And doubtless so

it was. He needed neither books nor company, neither work nor diversion, to entertain him. A book, ample enough, he had in silent nature around him, and the treasure of his own experience, which he could turn over at will. Work enough he had in self-examination, prayer, and converse with Him who seeth in secret ; company enough in fellowship with the Lord his God, whose whispers and footsteps, even the gentlest, he could discern far more readily and surely in this stilly solitude, than amidst the tumult of the world. Nature, that lay all around him, soon transformed itself into a fairly-written scripture, and became his Bible, stored with matter enough for reflection and study. The rock by which he dwelt preached to him of a rock that ever liveth, and on which he had builded for eternity. The brook had its own voice, and had much to say that was sweet and comforting, of God's truth and faithfulness ; and told of other waters that were yet to come, which God should pour upon the thirsty, of floods for the dry ground, and of streams that he should open in the desert. And now the shady trees began to preach, and sweetly to direct the prophet to the tree of life, in whose shade a mansion stood already prepared for him, and to the heavenly palms, from whose tops eternal peace should one day breathe on him. Then the cheerful songsters in the air, and the wild roses in the thickets, would sing to him, " Be still, O Elijah, and free from care. He who remembers us so faithfully in this wilderness, feeding the one, and giving freshness and beauty to the other, how shall He not care for thee ? " Every thing, in short, would begin to live and breathe around him ; to reason and to teach ; the stars in the firmament, the flowers on the bank, the drops on the leaves, the zephyrs among the trees ; so that Elijah would then vividly experience the truth of what the apostle says, " There are so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification "—1 Cor. xiv. 10 and could sing, with David,

"The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness."—Psal. xxix. 6, 8.

And having thus pleased and delighted himself a while with the outer world, and its figurative scripture, he would turn inward upon himself, and bury himself in self-contemplation, listening to the voices of this mysterious region, and to what was stirring and passing there. At one time, he would catch a new view of the depth of his own ruin and misery, and so find something to weep and mourn over, and lay before the Lord. At another time, his eye would rest upon the work of grace within him, and the indubitable proof of the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, furnished by his acts of creation, breathing, witnessing, and working in the soul; and then the melody of psalms would rise among the cliffs as in a temple of God, and hymns of devout thanksgiving would circle wondrously on the mountain echo, far through the depths of the wilderness.

Oh, let no one be ever too much cast down, should the Lord direct him to the wilderness of Jordan and the brook Cherith. Thus he deals occasionally with his children still, and in various ways. Behold, if he visit thee with sickness, so that thou must be alone with thyself on thy bed and in thy chamber, or if thy friends mistake thee, and leave and desert thee as an outcast to whom no one will open his house or heart more, or if thou must sojourn in Meshech, and dwell among men of a strange language, who do not understand thee and laugh at thy ways; in such cases thou sittest with Elijah by the brook Cherith. "But be of good cheer: be not afraid." Such seclusion and abandonment, oh, how blessed and salutary may it prove! Numberless Christians have been constrained to confess aloud, that it was in their imprisonment, or place of exile, on the lonely couch of sickness, or in the days when they were disowned and forsaken of men, and cast off by the world, that they first entered rightly into their own heart, and sounded the true state of their soul to the bottom; that it was then that the leaven of the Pharisees

(which is hypocrisy) was forced out of their tempers, and a Saviour desired who was no longer a dream of the fancy, so that to struggle in good earnest after close communion with him then began ; and a cleaving to his side ; and a Jacob's wrestling with him till the dawn of day, which they had known before only in word, became a real palpable fact of personal history, and entered into the soul and marrow of their own experience ; and a hundred other matters of vital Christianity, of which they had till then only speculated, became experimentally true in their own life. There also were they for the first time brought into the number of those sheep who hear *his* voice, and became inwardly persuaded, as never before, that he really lives and converses with his children face to face as a man with his friend, and has a personal walk and communion with them ; and never did they experience so strong, immediate, and indubitable tokens of his unwearied and tender care, and gracious presence, as even then, when their path was solitary and over the desert, and they were obliged to be with their Lord alone in the wide world. Be comforted, then, ye that dwell by the brook Cherith, and in the wilderness, for God's dew can drop upon the dwellings of the wilderness, as David sings ; the pastures of the wilderness are rich in blessings, and even its thorns must bear figs, and its thistles grapes for God's children.

"Thou shalt drink of the brook, and the ravens shall feed thee there." Thus spake the Lord : and, however wonderful and unheard of it might sound, Elijah bowed his head and believed the promise ; and his faith did not deceive him. All that the Lord had spoken was yea and amen, and "not one good word failed." It was not long till the whole land was like a heath, and field and wood as if wasted by fire ; one spot alone remained cool and green, the rocky vale of the prophet. Every fountain was exhausted ; every rushing woodland brook dried up by the parching heat ; only one brooklet continued to murmur, the little brook Cherith, and it remained as cool and clear, as fresh and full, as if no drought were in the land. The

ravens too fulfilled their office. How wonderful ! this ravenous and insatiable bird, unclean according to the law, and so voracious and unfeeling that it would let its own brood die of hunger, if God did not interpose, as he speaks in Job, xxxviii. 41. " Who provideth for the raven his food ? when his young ones cry unto God, they wander for lack of meat "—those creatures here meet us engaged in services of the most unselfish love, as if dead to the natural instinct of their species, coming and going at God's bidding, denying their own appetite, and bent on the kindest office to man. When the grey dawn looks over the parted rocks, their cry is heard in the trees, and when Elijah awakes, he sees his store of provision for the day lying at his feet ; and at fall of evening, they are there again, the black messengers, richly laden with meat and bread ; and hungry as each may be, none dare yield to his appetite. And this takes place not once merely, but a whole year round, twice a day, without intermission. O foolishness of God, how precious art thou ! let the world fashion to itself what stately gods it will, who rule only by grand and general laws ! We adhere to the God of Elijah, and rejoice in the minute care of his providence.

And this God still liveth, a living Saviour, who can be felt and found, whose delights are with the sons of men, and about whose servants and handmaids a mighty army ordained to wait ; who says " Come," and they come, and " Go," and they go ; who regards not the wisdom or art of the world, but makes dogs the physicians of his servants, and ravens their ministers, as he pleases ; who mocks the proud, and sports as it were with his children ; and of whose wonders there is no end to this day. What other was it than the God of Elijah, who lately in our neighbourhood delivered a poor man so kindly out of his distress, not indeed by a raven, but by a poor singing bird. The man was sitting early at his house door, and his eyes were red with weeping, and his sighs rose to heaven, for he was expecting a visit from the officers of justice to distrain him for a small debt, from which no one could be pre-

vailed on to save him by a loan; and, as he sat there with a heavy heart, there flew a little bird through the street, that fluttered in distress up and down as if it could find no rest, till at last, quick as an arrow, it flew over the good man's head into the cottage and perched upon an empty cupboard. The good man who little dreamt who had sent him the bird, hastily shuts the door, catches the bird, and puts in a cage, where it presently began to sing very sweetly, and it seemed to the man as if it were the tune of a favourite hymn, "Fear thou not when darkness reigns;" and he listened gladly, and his heart caught up the sentiment. Suddenly there came a knock to his door. Ah! the officers of justice, thought the poor man, and was sore afraid. But no! it was the servant of a respectable lady, who told him that the neighbours had seen a bird fly into his house, and that he wished to know if he had caught it. "O yes," replied the man, "there it is," and the bird was carried away. After some minutes, however, the servant returned.—"You have done my mistress a great service," said he, "the bird which flew away from her was worth its weight in gold. She is much obliged to you, and requests your acceptance of this trifle, with her thanks." It was neither more nor less than the sum he owed. And when the officers came he said, "Here is the amount of the debt; leave me now in peace: my God hath sent it me."

Something quite similar once befell another brother, who is perhaps here present, and can attest the circumstance. He was once in the deeply painful situation of seeing his children weep for hunger, while there was not a morsel of bread in the house, and not a farthing in his pocket; and his heart was like to faint with perplexity. He then retired into a solitary corner, and prayed with many tears to God, who feeds the young ravens, and decks the lilies of the field, and presented the petition, "Give us this day our daily bread," in a way he had never done before; and, as he arose from his knees with a lightened heart, and stood by the door of his house, a dog came

running along with a piece of flesh in his mouth, and, as he passed by the threshold of the poor man, he let it fall and hurried away. "That the Lord sends us," said the poor man, as he took it from the ground. "The faithful God," sighed he, as he brought it into the room; and when it was made ready and laid upon the table, and the hungry children gathered round, and the grace, "The eyes of all wait on thee," was over, the joy of all was as great as if the paschal lamb had lain before them.

Yes! The God of Elijah still lives. And in this chapter is found the counterpart of your experience also, ye dear friends, who have related to me that often in your bitter straits and perplexities a strange help has come to you, just from such people as were not only indifferent to you, but harsh also, and unkind; from unbelievers, who at other times could not endure the "quiet in the land."—Psalms xxxv. 20. But then it was suddenly suggested to one, he knew himself not how, that he should send you this or that; while another had his night's rest broken by the thought that he had not done some particular thing for you; and as they strove to banish these ideas from their minds, they could not succeed in kicking against the pricks. Yes! He who turneth men's hearts as the rivers of water, he impelled them to be your helpers; and he is not to be resisted when he has a purpose to fulfil. What they did to you they did not because they intended it, but from a higher necessity; and thus you have found that the God of Elijah, who can feed his servants even by the ravens, still lives.

Let every child of his then be strong and of a cheerful courage. Believe, only believe, ye who are at the brook Cherith, and in the wilderness; for faith can supply the want of all things temporal, and is the grave of care; and know also, my dear friends, that it is vain for you to rise early and sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness; for, as David says, "He gives it to his beloved sleeping."\* May that God who giveth songs in the night teach

us all the strains of the royal psalmist,—“ I will both lay me down in peace and sleep ; for thou Lord only makest me dwell in safety.” Psalms iv. 8.

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### III.—THE DEPARTURE FOR ZAREPHATH.

When the children of Israel once did evil in the sight of the Lord, he sold them into the hand of the Midianites, a fierce and warlike people, that they might drive back the strayed sheep into the fold of the Chief Shepherd.

At that period the misery of Israel was great. A considerable portion of the nation left house and home, fled to the forests and mountains, took refuge in dark dens and caves in the rocks ; and some intrenched themselves in solitary mountain fortresses, and, as soon as Israel sowed the fields, the Midianites came down like a mighty cloud of locusts upon them, and destroyed every green thing from the land, and “ left no sustenance for Israel, nor sheep, nor ox, nor ass.”

This sharp scourge did not fail of its effect. Israel knew their guilt, and smote upon their thigh, and all hands were stretched forth to God in the caves and rocks around,—“ Return, return to thine oppressed heritage.” The faithful God heard them, and took measures for their relief.”

In the field of Ophra stands a solitary oak, and near it there is a threshing-floor, in which a young husbandman is at work ; and ever and anon he looks around him with anxious eye, for he fears an inroad of the Midianites, from whom he seeks to save the corn. His name is Gideon. And, as the excellent youth is thusso busily employed, a stranger unexpectedly enters, of high and noble aspect, and upon whose countenance there sits a sun-like radiance. He seats himself under the oak, like one weary with a lengthened journey ; and, as Gideon gazes on him, the noble stranger opens his mouth and says, “ The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.” Then Gideon started, and thought, “ How strange a greeting is



this !” But soon divining rightly in whose presence he was, he freely disclosed what lay nearest his heart.—“ Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this evil befallen us ? and where are all the miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt ? But now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites.”—Judges vi. 12, 13. So Gideon : Then the history informs us, “ *The Lord looked on him,*” and that Lord was the Son of God ; and, as he looked on him with grace and favour, he said, “ Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites : have not I sent thee ?”—Judges vi. 14.

To be looked on by the Lord is not always a source of pleasure and enjoyment. As he once looked on the Egyptians, it was as if a resistless peal of thunder had swept through the whole host, and the hearts of the mighty were instantly smitten with terror, and the thoughts of the wise were confounded and darkened. “ He looks on the mountains and they tremble.” Such a look it was from those eyes, which are as a flame of fire, that alighted on the attendants of Daniel ; such a terror came over them, and they fled and hid themselves. And how mournfully do we hear Job sighing, as if his sighs came from the bottom of the pit. “ Thy eyes are upon me and I am not ! Am I a sea or a whale, that thou settest a watch over me ? How long wilt thou not depart from me, nor let me alone, till I swallow down my spittle ? I have sinned, what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men ? Why dost thou not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity ?”—Job vii. 8, 12 ; 19, 21. And there is yet another looking down of the Majesty of Heaven on the worms of the dust ; a penetrating of the eye of the thrice Holy One into our darkness, a fixed gaze of Eternal Justice upon the sinner ; which is the most awful of all terrors which the miserable soul of man can experience on the earth : and yet it must be felt and experienced, or we shall never pass into the light of God’s countenance.

The look which was vouchsafed to Gideon by the oak was a look of condescension and of grace. The eye on which he then looked had in it nothing awful and overwhelming, but was like an open cheerful sky, clear and soft, and tender, and shone on him in mild and benevolent lustre. It was one of the looks of God's countenance which makes the dead live, the mourner shout for joy, one with which whole streams of peace and gladness enter the wounded spirit, and of which David sings, "Cause thy face to shine and we shall be saved."—Psalms lxxx. 17.

With the look of grace, the Lord gives Gideon also this direction, "Go in this thy might." In what might? In the might of my countenance, which has assured thee of my loving-kindness.

Ah yes, the power of such gracious looks, which convince the favoured saint in his inmost soul that the Lord loves him, is truly great. The hearts which but a little while ago were like a stormy ocean are changed in a moment into a temple of heavenly sabbatic rest; and the souls which sat lately in sackcloth and ashes mount up suddenly like eagles on the wings of joy and transport, as soon as the beams of divine compassion have alighted upon them. Then, not seldom, people known hitherto only for their simple piety unfold themselves all at once, like flowers of Paradise, spreading around them the most precious fragrance; and powers and gifts are suddenly disclosed in them, which look as if showered down on them from above. Reserved and backward persons begin then to testify for Christ in so lovely a manner that one is never tired of hearing them; and modest and timorous souls come forth with confessions of their Saviour, and of his love, so joyful, ready, and undaunted, that one can scarce comprehend how all at once their courage has grown so decided. And what sacrifices are then made! of what acts of self-denial are we then capable! what patience is then shewn! what resignation! and how fervent the brotherly love which is then displayed! And whence all this? It is the power of the Lord's gracious smile! It

is the fruit of this conviction, "My Saviour loved *me*, and gave himself for *me*."—Gal. ii. 20.

"Go in this thy might," said the Lord to Gideon, as he vouchsafed him the look of love and grace, as if the Lord had said, "It is not my intention, O Gideon, that thou shouldst subdue the enemy in thy own strength. I point thee to my might: not to thine own. This, Gideon! be thy strength, that I have looked on thee in favour; let this encourage thee; let this suffice thee that I am gracious unto thee. In this thy strength, go forth and conquer."

Truly a precious assurance! Know only this one thing, that He is graciously inclined to thee, and then thou mayest dismiss all fear and doubt for ever. Make sure only of the evidence that he is thy friend, and then thou needest dread neither storm nor tempest; then, though thy foes were thousands round about thee, thou mayest laugh at the shaking of the spear; and, though mountains rise to heaven upon thy path, thou canst trust in an arm that will bear thee over all. Put not *thine own* strength in the balance, and measure not doubtingly thy own power. Whether thou art strong or weak, armed or unarmed, is here no more a question. The strength of Immanuel is at thy call; and his love to thee is thy banner, thy sword, thy helmet and mail, thy shield and buckler; and, if thou wantest aught besides, "his love shall supply all thy need according to his glorious riches." When thou art sent, be it into the fires of temptation, or the waters of affliction, be it into domestic straits and necessities, or severe conflicts and difficult undertakings; nay, though it were into peril and death, if he has looked on thee in grace, and thou knowest only this one thing, "my Saviour loves me," then go, "go in this thy might." Thou hast no cause for fear, none for anxiety. Thy Saviour will attend thee and protect thee, because he loveth thee, and his love is stronger than death. He will make all thy ways plain before thee.

In the strength of such a look of grace and kindness, which he had received from his Lord, Elijah went to the

brook Cherith. In the same strength we shall see him to-day enter upon a new path of duty, equally hard and painful with the former. And, behold, the Lord is with him, and it becomes a path of blessing.

1 KINGS, xvii. 7—16.

“And it came to pass, after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land. And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee. So he arose, and went to Zarephath; and when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks; and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. And she said, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse; and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it and die. And Elijah said unto her, “Fear not; go and do as thou hast said; but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son: For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth. And she went, and did according to the saying of Elijah; and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah.”

We find our prophet again to-day where we last left him. He has not deserted the post to which his Lord and King had appointed him. The lonely wilderness in which he dwells is not yet become too savage for him; the waste, unpeopled desert, not yet too dreary. His God is with him. So long as his pleasure lasts, the walls of stone, the green shade, and grassy couch are good enough for the prophet. There he sits—the admirable man—upon his hard seat of rock, and thinks with himself, “The Lord will provide.” The raven train perform their service faithfully giving the prophet morning and evening matter for praise and thanksgiving, and the brook Cherith runs by with full and gladdening murmur, a miracle the more astonishing, that this brook usually ran dry much earlier than any other, and was called, from this very circumstance, Cherith, which signifies, in the original language, “*Drought.*”

Now, however, we are to see the scene change, and the

history take another course, a course which appears in its beginning in the highest degree surprising and painful, in its further developement very mysterious and inexplicable, but in its issue equally delightful and glorifying to God. We have here three points to consider : first, Elijah's need ; second, his departure from Cherith ; third, his glorious supply.

Let us premise a general reflection. A whole year long, as we know, had Elijah been supplied and supported by a miracle. But a miracle permanent and long-continued loses its nature, and ceases in our eyes to be a miracle. Through lapse of time we come to regard it as something that must be so, and could not be otherwise. It soon ceases to make an impression on us, and God's agency and presence in it is soon forgotten and disregarded by us. You know the eastern tale of a boy who once challenged his teacher to prove to him the existence of a God by miracle. The priest, as the story goes, got a vessel filled with earth, wherein he deposited a kernel in the boy's presence, and bade him pay attention, and, miracle indeed ! in the place where the kernel was laid there starts suddenly up a green shoot, the shoot becomes a stem, the stem puts forth twigs and branches, and soon fills with its foliage the whole apartment. Buds and blossoms then unfold themselves among the leaves ; the blossoms wither and pass into golden fruit ; and, in the space of one hour, there stood a majestic tree where before there was only a small seed scarcely visible. The youth was overwhelmed with amazement, and, in a transport of admiration, cried out, " Now I know that there is a God, for I have seen his power." But the priest smiled, and said, " Foolish child, dost thou now believe ? What thou hast now seen thou seest year after year around thee, many thousand times, only by a slower process, and in a regular course. But is the marvel on that account the less ?" But we are just such foolish children. Should we rise up some morning, and find a loaf in the house that neither we nor any one else had brought there, it would

not be difficult for us in such a case to recognise the hand of the Lord ; but we equally find a loaf every morning in our houses, and beyond all question God has put it there. But because he has done so in a slower and less uncommon way, strengthening our powers and blessing our labour ; and because we find it there constantly, it becomes very difficult for us to recognise him and his power and goodness in the matter. Nay, and should he actually manifest himself to us in an extraordinary manner, so that we should feel constrained to exclaim, " Behold, this is the finger of God ;" yet, could not such a manifestation be too long continued, otherwise it would soon cease to be *marvellous* ; and it would be well if it did not also cease to be regarded as *divine*. Once or twice manna in the wilderness ! it is marvellous in our eyes, and we praise God the Lord. Manna every day becomes an *every day* thing ; men look on it as a matter of course, and see at last only the manna, and not the hand which rains it down. Once water from the rock, and then again heat and drought ; this teaches us to give God the glory. But should the smitten rock follow us with its daily stream, and give forth its waters without ceasing, and no misery of drought again recur, that would not be for our good. God would soon be forgotten, in spite of the miracle which he daily wrought for us.

Let it not be absolutely affirmed that it was so with Elijah at the brook Cherith. Far be it from us, without distinct evidence, to think so hardly of him. But James tells us, " Elias was a man of like passions with ourselves ;" and it could very easily happen to any such possessor of human nature, that, through length of time, the special aspect of miracle in the case, which always strengthens faith, renews the inward man, and raises the soul to God, might have quite disappeared ; and he might have come, in time, to think, " Well now, this brook Cherith flows like other brooks, so long as they have water, and are supplied from the spring." Thus we children of men are wont to do, just to put the long-suffering of God to the proof, and,

if it were possible, to weary him, and to provoke him to cast us off for ever. But among the many trying offices of kindness towards his children, which our gracious God has taken upon himself, there is that which he promises in Isaiah xlv. 4., "Even to hoar hairs will I bear you."\* Yes, there is something about us to be borne by him; and, since he knows well that a perpetual blessing can so easily become to us no blessing at all, it is to Him a matter of adorable care, with that bearing love of his, that our life shall not want vicissitudes, and he makes his guidance of us in providence a constant alternation of summer and winter, day and night, rain and sunshine, trouble and help, anguish and deliverance. For it is thus we are preserved in spiritual training and exercise, and kept from wandering in thought from his throne of grace, since we have then always something to transact with him, some matter of prayer or thanksgiving, some cry for help, or confession of humility, some course of watching and of waiting for his mercy. For this reason the God of all grace made the way of Elijah run so much in zigzag, full of crossings and turnings, serpentine bends and ceaseless revolutions. How varied is the complexion of his life! It is a work of varied texture and of plaided colour. It is made up of innumerable exigencies and innumerable mercies and deliverances. Hence it is a life so full of eternal blessing.

Our present text commences with the words, "And it came to pass, that, *after a while*, the brook dried up." This would seem to indicate a very short stay by the brook Cherith; but the inference is erroneous. In Gen. iv. 3, where the birth of Cain and Abel is narrated to us, we find a similar expression. "It came to pass, *after a while*, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering to the Lord. Here it is self-evident that the expression "*after a while*" cannot mean a short time, but must denote a considerably long period of years. In the narrative before us, we must understand by it a whole year, which

was the period of Elijah's sojourn in the wilderness. We learn from the mouth of the Lord Jesus, Luke iv. 25, and also from the apostle James, v. 17, that the drought lasted three years and six months. We also learn from 1st Kings xviii. 1, that, at the time when the drought ceased, the prophet was in the third year of his stay (that is, two years and some months, probably six,) at Zarephath. Where then could he spend the other year? Where but at the brook Cherith? This calculation is only introduced by the way, and for the sake of those to whom our assertion, that Elijah was a whole year in the wilderness, might appear gratuitous and unfounded.

The year then was passed by God's help, partly in faith, partly in sight, and certainly amid great hardships, but on the whole a thousand times better and happier than Elijah could have imagined at its commencement. How long he should still remain he knew not. He left that to God. Perhaps he might be obliged to conclude that it would be till the famine was fairly over. "Well, be it so, in God's name." Hitherto he had felt no want. The ravens did their office; the brook kept flowing, and, having lasted this year, why should it dry up the next? Such were probably the new-year's reflections of the prophet. But soon he had to take up a different strain. O dark foreboding! It was not long till it began to strike him that a decrease of the water was visible. He could scarcely believe his eyes. Has God said, "Thou shalt drink of the brook?" and thus virtually promised that its waters should not fail? But what avails it? He begins to measure; he plants marks by the water's edge; it is too true, the brook decreases by the hour; the bottom comes in sight; and soon, where flowed the water, there is nothing to be seen but a bed of pebbles. What meaneth this? Yes, Elijah, stand and ponder! Water is nowhere to be found. O, the depths of God! the wonders of his guidance! the severity of his trials! What meaneth it? might Elijah say. So long preserved, and now forsaken! So certain a promise, and such an issue! How shall I account for it; am I no



longer his prophet? have I sinned against him so deeply that I am now rejected? Does it repent him to have held communion with me? Thus might he have thought: and who can tell what the old man within him may have further suggested, and how he may have begun to murmur and to open his mouth in hard words and presumptuous counsels. Elijah was in a great strait; *outwardly*, as death by thirst was imminently near; but much more *inwardly*, for the temptation to distrust his God was not distant, and then his faith had dried up and disappeared like the brook.

Yes! my dear brethren, it is beyond question one of the very worst and hardest of trials that can befall us, when, from a happy situation of peculiar comfort and security, on which we had entered with deep and thankful joy, and with the firmest confidence that God alone had ordered our lot in his grace, we are suddenly and against all expectation torn away, so that the song of praise dies on our tongues, and is changed into lamentation and woe. Take an example: You find yourself in affliction and domestic embarrassment. I shall suppose you are in debt, and must either pay or go to prison. You wrestle with God in prayer for help. He sends help; the amount of your debt is suddenly sent in some extraordinary way to your house. Your heart is melted in praise and thankfulness. "Now I know assuredly that the Lord liveth and heareth prayer." But what happens! In the night thieves break into your house and steal your treasure, and on the morrow you must take your way to prison. Again; suppose that, with great labour and sweat of your brow, you have at last succeeded in gaining a small farm. You bend the knee and pray to God to bless your labours with increase, that you may support yourself and your family; and, behold, your fields prosper abundantly. "This comes from the Lord," you say, "I see now that he is faithful, and has mercy on his creatures." But, whilst you are thus full of praise and thanks, and ready to call on every one to magnify the Lord with you and exalt his name, a season of

drought comes, and your land and that of all your neighbours is changed into a waste. And what is your language then? "O these are sore trials!" and they are all the sorer that the misfortune comes in a quite common way. Now, had the money that you received so wonderfully been suddenly melted in your coffer by a thunderbolt, or had it disappeared in some altogether mysterious way, how very natural would have been the language of Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away;" and it might not have been so difficult to add, "Blessed be the name of the Lord." In such a case your conviction would still be, "Well now, I see that the Lord's hand is busy here, and is still near me; and he will soon appear for my deliverance." But when, on the contrary, your property is lost in so common, nay sinful a way, you are much more open to the thought, "The Lord hath not taken it away; and, perhaps, it was not the Lord who gave it me; else why should he not have preserved it to me?" The matter looks, in truth, as if God's care for us were extremely small; and you are in the greatest danger of falling into the belief that you have deceived yourself in tracing the favour to God's special love; and that, however wonderful it was in its appearance, it was nothing more than a work of accident, and a fruit of purely natural arrangements.

Thus also the trial of the prophet's faith was materially aggravated by the circumstance that the brook did not dry up suddenly, nor by a miracle, nor in any mysterious way; for in that case it would have been clearer that the same Lord who made it flow had made its flowing cease; but because he dried up its waters quite in the ordinary way, gradually, like other streams, by continued drought and heat of the sun. And then it seemed indeed as if Nature, and not Jehovah, were God. The cause why the brook Cherith dried up is expressly added in our text, "The brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land;" a common and natural cause. Why this is expressly recorded by the Holy Ghost, we may venture to surmise. It is to set before us in the liveliest manner the whole

severity of the trial to which Elijah was subjected. The prophet was probably greatly distressed by this fiery trial, and did not come out of it without great conflict and strong crying and tears. A sore questioning of his own heart was probably the first movement to which this occurrence led ; for it could not but look as a punishment of his sins. The feeling of desertion also would not leave his soul unharassed ; and the forces of corrupt nature would take their wonted side. For they could not remain idle in such a case. The thoughts of nature can never be as God's thoughts ; nature could not but rebel, excite to impiety, scoff at the prophet's faith, and lend this counsel, " arise, and help thyself, for there is no help in thy God." Who can tell what suggestions of the Wicked One might thus assail his soul ! but Elijah remained firm, believed to the end, and obtained the victory. He had a trusty sword in his hands wherewith to repel all these assaults. That was the word of his God, " Get thee hence, hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan, and thou shalt drink of the brook." He was silent before God in faith : in faith he waited ; and by faith he crucified the flesh, with its affections and lusts.

O ye brethren of Elijah at Cherith, and in the wilderness, ye children of God, that sigh beside exhausted brooks and dried up fountains, would that ye were still and patient, and then ye would be strong ; would that ye believed, for " ye should see the glory of God." When one thinks what promises have been given you, one might almost be tempted to be heartily displeased and angry with you for your sighing and apprehensions, ye repining and mistrustful race ! What cause hast thou to despond, O Israel ? O Jacob, what hast thou to fear ? " Ah," you reply, " the heart knoweth its own bitterness ;" you must have felt our cross to understand it." Well, my dear brethren, " the crooked shall be made straight," as the Baptist says. " Ah," you add, " you should first know what it is to experience sufferings which run directly counter to the promises of God." Nay, my dear brethren, this never can be

the case. You are in error ; things run counter only to your will and desire, never to the word of God. You have settled in your own minds *how* and in *what manner* the Lord should fulfil his promises to you, and, since it turns out otherwise, you give way to the idea that the Lord has not done as he had said. The promise shall assuredly be “ *Yea* and *Amen* ;” leave only the *How* to his wisdom and his love, and be patient and still, for he will do all things well. For, tell me, who is he on whom the Lord has wholly set his eye, and for whom Eternal Love left heaven to sojourn on the earth ? who is the child of his heart ; and the son towards whom his bowels of compassion are moved ? Is it not thou, O Jacob ! “ Fear not, then, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel : I will help you, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer.”—Isa. xli. 14.

All this is true, not merely of temporal, but also of spiritual blessings. When one finds the spiritual brook Cherith dry up, the affliction cannot be borne in silence. How great the distress, when all peace expires in the soul, and all blessedness is gone, when zeal has waxed cold, and devotion dull and languid, when one can no longer pray from extreme spiritual barrenness, and the spirit of praise and thanksgiving has, so to speak, lost itself in the sand ; and still God has said, “ that he will water his vineyard every moment, and keep it night and day.” All these are so many trials. But be of good cheer ; God is faithful to his word ; and, for the moment, would you but believe it, this inward drought which you lament is but a means of further refreshment for you, and in the barren ground there lies already the seed of blessing. Believe, then, that he will keep his word. As to *how* he shall keep it, let not the clay presume to strive with the potter. Let him do with you as seemeth him good ; the end of your song will ever be, “ O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of face.”—Dan. ix. 7.

II.—Elijah remained where he was for the sake of the Lord who had sent him thither, and waited patiently. A

noble example ! For a soldier of the cross to leave of his own will and choice a post to which the Great Captain has sent him, can have no good issue. Elijah endured, and the helper came. But how came he ! Quite otherwise than Elijah had probably expected. Was it with water, with consolation and refreshment ? No, it was with a commission, which, for ought I know, might be grateful to faith perhaps, but assuredly not to flesh and blood. " Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there : behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee " Yes, reason is once more compelled to quit the field. To reach Zarephath, he must enter the country of the Phenicians. The journey besides is long, and not less toilsome, through wild deserts and dreary wastes of sand, and that, too, at a period of universal famine, and under the fiercest heat of the sun. " Get thee to Zarephath, that belongeth to Zidon." Thus he must quit the soil of Israel for the land of heathens and idolaters, the native country of Jezebel, the bitter enemy of the people of God, and over which Jezebel's father swayed the sceptre—a blood-thirsty tyrant, who, in league with his son-in-law Ahab, had doubtless issued many an edict against the liberty and life of the prophet. " And, behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee." Strange comfort this ! A woman who had lost her own sustainer ; a Phenician widow, hence a heathen, against whose gods Elijah was so inflamed with zeal. And what widow ? How shall the right one be found among the many thousand widows in the land ? Truly a singular direction to remove ; not less so than that which had brought him there ! " It was bringing the blind by a way that they knew not," Isa. xlii. 16. " Only be still, and know that I am God," Psa. xli. 10. Most of the paths which the Lord takes with his children are like the day which is born of dark night, and takes its rise in the faint glimmer of twilight ; but soon the morning sun sheds its rays, and shineth more and more unto the perfect noon.

" Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth unto

Zidon ;" and, we may add, to Tyre also, as it lay mid-way between these commercial capitals. *Zarephath* signifies in the original, "a place of smelting furnaces," which may remind us of the furnace of affliction whereby the Lord purifies and refines his people. The whole direction of the prophet appeared only as a direction into the furnace. But the direction was of God. It is the Lord's will ; go forward in his name. The prophet bids his silent dwelling-place the last farewell, perhaps with sadness of heart, for it had become so much of a home to him, amid these wild rocks ; he blesses the spot where he had experienced so much of the kindness of Him who had been the help of his countenance and his God ; and then he gathers up his mantle, takes his pilgrim-staff, the staff of God's word, in the hand of faith, and sets out for the Phenician land. And on this highway of faith no lion has devoured him, no serpent has harmed him. It was indeed no path of roses ; but strewed thick with the thorns of self-denial. Yet the Son of Man was with him, who thrashes the mountains, rebukes the swelling of the sea, and revives, in his grace, the spirit of the humble.

III. Ere the prophet is aware, he has reached the end of his journey. *Zarephath* lies there before him, on its rocky eminences, with its smoking houses and furnaces of iron ; for the busy little town had thence its name. "Now, Lord, how much farther, and whither." Only be calm, Elijah, and patient. The Lord has been here before you, and all is ready and in order. The prophet walks slowly forward. His way leads beside a wood in front of the town. There he observes a little behind him, among the bushes, a woman, meanly dressed, and employed in gathering a few sticks for fuel. "That is the widow," is suddenly impressed on his mind. "Is that the widow?" he might reply. This miserably poor woman, who appears herself to be sunk in the deepest indigence, and probably lives only on charity. But he goes on to reflect, If this be the sustainer whom God intends me to find, she shall not

want the means. What can be impossible to Him who fed me, by the mouth of voracious ravens, a year long, by the brook? And is it not His way to send help contrary to reason and expectation, and to save by means which promise no deliverance, simply to exalt the glory of his own great name. Thus may Elijah have communed with his own heart. Yes, he trusted his Lord, who could easily make this poor woman to minister to his need; and the man of God had humility enough, in all simplicity, to contemplate the hovel of this poor beggar in the thicket as his future lodging, and not to shrink from the prospect.

And now he must see what the character of the woman is. He therefore called to her and said, "Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink." The woman looks up to see the stranger, leaves her burden behind her, and hurries away to the town to fulfil his request. Elijah is struck; the readiness of the heathen woman gives him a very agreeable surprise; and he all but makes up his mind that this is the widow in question. He is emboldened to make a further request. "Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thy hand." The words, however, opened the wounds of this poor woman's heart afresh, by reminding her of her sad condition. Her oppressed heart must find relief. She can no longer keep back her tale of want. She must pour her whole distress into the bosom of the stranger. She answered, "As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake; but a handful of meal in a barrel and a little oil in a cruse; and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it and die." Alas! how mournful does this sound; how affecting and heart-rending! Who can read it without tears? But what says Elijah to the tale? Does he think still "she is the widow?" Yes; he not only thinks so, he is now convinced of it. He gathers from her words that she has no husband, for she speaks only of herself and of her son. Her great poverty is no objection. He trusts in the "Lord who will provide." And how strange but encouraging her lan-

guage, "As the Lord thy God liveth." How unwonted and sweet the sound in a strange and heathen land. She knows the Lord; a secret worshipper of the living God; a rose among thorns; a hidden dove in the clefts of the rock; a *converted* soul; one of the few among the heathen whom the word of the Lord had reached. Oh, blessed discovery! Who can describe the prophet's joy! A sister in the land of Meshech! And does she not say, "As the Lord *thy* God liveth." The Lord *thy* God! Whence knows she that I also am a servant of the living God? O, marvellous disposal of divine love! O, blessed meeting! O, precious acquaintance!

Yes, he alone who has felt it can tell how blessed and delightful it is when banished to a strange country, where the way to Zion lies desolate, and cast out into the circle of this world's children, and, as it were, by the waters of Babylon, one finds unexpectedly, in the wide waste, some citizen of Canaan, some brother or sister in the Lord. This is joy unspeakable; and were there no more than one, the desert straightway begins to rejoice and to blossom as the rose. In such cases, it appears in full clearness that the mutual love of the regenerate is not so poor and imperfect a thing as the world has often asserted it to be; that the love of which our Lord says, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another," is really in all his people, and that, however latent it may be, it can never be extinguished. The joy of Elijah is thus still tasted in our world. Thanks be to God for it, and also for the assurance, that everywhere in the earth, even where hirelings and wolves devour the flocks, the God of grace has his sheep and hidden doves; that those sheep which pasture on barren plains bear often the finest wool; and that the proverb holds wonderfully true—"The children of God find out each other."

As Elijah now knew that it was the widow, of whom God had spoken to him, he hesitated no longer to address to her all the comfort in his power. He was directed by



God to say to her, "Fear not, go and do as thou hast said ; but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me ; and after make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth."

The promise in the latter part of this address removed all the difficulties in the former. It lightened the faith of the widow and encouraged her to do as Elijah had said ; and the three cakes were actually produced, and Elijah did eat, and she and her son, and all were supplied in the most wonderful and glorious way. Blessed indeed is the path of faith !

Behold, then, the man of God now sitting in the lonely cottage (not far from the sea, if we may credit an old legend). There is now his home, and he is quite cheerful, and the whole house rejoices in his company, not for his worldly gifts alone, but much more for the spiritual blessings which he brings with him. Israel has lost her prophet ; a poor widow has found him. Thus it fares with a people who are slow of turning to the Lord, and who will not repent under any preacher. The bread is taken from them and given to the dogs, who are languishing for it without. Of this our Lord reminded the people of Nazareth, as recorded in Luke (iv. 25) in these words, "I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land ; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow."

Yes, there the prophet sits, in tranquil happiness with the whole house. All want has disappeared. The meal in the barrel is not consumed ; the cruse of oil ever replenishes itself, according to the word of the Lord. A spiritual table is also newly spread from day to day. O how this poor woman delights in the privilege of sitting day after day at the feet of this wise and holy man of God, to learn from him the truths of heaven ; and how gladly does

Elijah open his mouth in divine wisdom to this dear, affectionate, and simple-hearted sister. They pray together, read together in Moses and the prophets, discourse of the promised Messiah and his appearance in the world, raise now and then a spiritual song to the praise of the Lord; and the hours pass swiftly and pleasantly by; and the angels of God may well rejoice over such a little church in the wilderness, and look down on it with gladness. Behold, then, dear brethren, here is the issue and termination of a way which began in such deep darkness. Thus God leads his children, in all things pertaining to life or to godliness, at all times to the most glorious end.

Only mark what is said of Elijah. "He arose and went." It is a noble testimony. Let it then be equally said of each of you, whithersoever the Lord may call you, "He arose and went." Be the way ever so painful, "arise and go." Go forward, strong in *faith*; be still and endure: it will end in *light* thus, in one wonder of grace or another; and whosoever has ventured on the bark of life at God's bidding, far away from land, and is now tossed to and fro on the open sea, let him fear not, but cast his anchor in the depths of divine faithfulness, and by the rock of his eternal promises. Let him be of good courage, and exclaim, with the sweet singer of Israel, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God."—Ps. xlii. 11.

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### III.—RAISING THE WIDOW'S SON AT ZAREPHATH.

The purifying of a chosen soul in the wine-press of trouble, which is at work in God's vineyard night and day, shall form the subject of this day's meditation.

1 KINGS, xvii. 17—24.

"And it came to pass after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him. And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son? And he said unto her, Give me thy son. And he took him out of

her bosom, and carried him up into a loft where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed. And he cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son? And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again. And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived. And Elijah took the child, and brought him down out of the chamber into the house, and delivered him unto his mother: and Elijah said, See, thy son liveth. And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth."

Here again we have a new instance of God's peculiar guidance; another of those ways, which are indeed wonderfully dark and mysterious, but not the less pure, goodness, and truth. We have here recorded an attack of grace on the part of the great spiritual conqueror. Its object is the heart of the poor widow of Sarepta: already had the outwork fallen; but it must be absolutely mastered and subdued.

Let us unite, then, in contemplating this work of Him whose name is Wonderful, and its glorious consequences.

We have here, I., The assault of grace; II., The perfect victory; III., The calm after the storm.

I. We find our prophet where we last left him, in the land of Sidon, by the sea shore, in the silent, peaceful dwelling of the widow of Zarephath. His stay there has now been lengthened. He has passed, not weeks only, but many months, in his still, quiet retreat. A pleasant time, a life of enjoyment, flowing on like a stream, clear and bright, and without fall or whirlpool. A life divided betwixt praises and prayer; betwixt pious discourse and offices of kindness; betwixt study of the divine word and contemplation of the works of God in nature; and day by day crowned anew with tokens of Jehovah's grace and kindness. Now, I am certain that many among ourselves would have been ashamed of such an inactive quiet sort of life, made up of nothing but receiving and enjoying; and that they would have felt it a reproach, and have sought again as soon as possible the scene of labour and activity. But Elijah was not so ambitious of employment. The belief that there is in human labour and effort a certain worth

for its own sake, a certain available and meritorious value, he had long ago discarded as a vain and foolish supposition. He knew that all that men receive from the treasury of heaven is a pure gift of the most unconditional grace, and therefore he left it entirely to his Lord's disposal, whether he should appoint him a goodly heritage in the land of Goshen, under his vine and fig-tree, or station him in the desert, under the waving of the banner of war, and in the scene of toil and mortal struggle. "Be it as my God will" was his watchword. Did the Lord summon him to labour and conflict, he was at his post. Did he shut him up, as at Zarephath, in the haven of rest; far from aiming at self-willed escape, he thought with the Psalmist, "It is vain to rise up early and sit up late, eating the bread of carefulness, for he gives it to his beloved whilst they sleep."

Thus no scruple of conscience assailed the prophet in the midst of his happy days at Zarephath. He knew that his time was in the hands of the Lord, and he was full of joy and hallowed thankfulness, and of freedom from care, as a harmless child. Would that we were all thus like little children. Whosoever among you is in the situation of Elijah, be the circumstances and causes of it what they may, be it from feebleness or age, from want of opportunity or of gifts, of influence or of personal resources, be it from poverty or widowhood, or from any other cause whatever, that one is excluded from the sphere of active service, or laid aside from those works of faith to which we are too apt to attach the idea of merit, let such an one consider that the Lord has directed him to Zarephath, to serve him there in peace and quietness; and let him not fill his mind with idle scruples and unprofitable niceties, but let him rather embrace this life of repose with thankfulness to its Author. And whosoever among us thus lives in the Lord's bosom, and feels his soothing hand, and not the rod of displeasure, and enjoys the blessedness of him who "eats bread in the kingdom of God," and feels his heart satisfied to overflowing with the goodness of God's

house, let him continue "to drink, yea, drink abundantly," and rejoice greatly in the God of his salvation, and make no scruple to rejoice in the Lord alway, and yet, again, to rejoice ; and let him not vex and harass himself with the thought that he is so free from struggles and doubts, from darkness and temptation, while other brethren lie in the dust ; much less let him strive to work himself into this frame of doubt and darkness, as if it were necessary to pass through it, or remain in it, in order to be a Christian and at peace with God—an idea fraught with absurdity, and rising from the self-righteous blindness of our corrupt nature. Tarry at Zarephath, gracious soul, so long as God pleases. Rejoice, since the bridegroom is with thee ; when once he shall be taken from thee the time of fasting will come of itself. Act like the Shulamite in the Song of songs. When the Lord led her into his banqueting-house, she followed without scruple, and went not out to force tears of affected sadness, but sang with joy, "I sat under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet unto my taste. He brought me to the banqueting-house, and his banner over me was love. He stayed me with flagons ; he comforted me with apples." Be not afraid to bound "like a young roe on the mountains of spices," so long as thy master grants thee liberty. Thou shalt not miss the salutary cross and the needful struggle in their own good time. In a word, it is as far wrong, of our own self-will, to make a Sabbath, when the Lord gives us one, into a week-day, as it is wrong to convert the week-day, when he enjoins it, of our own self-will, into a Sabbath.

Was there not also, my dear brethren, something beautifully interesting in the perpetual miracle of which this poor widow's house was the scene. The merciful God, who governs a thousand worlds, and in whose hands are the affairs of the universe, visited this humble dwelling nightly with his grace, replenishing the barrel and the cruse ; and, when its inmates rose in the morning, they had been blessed in their sleep, before they had found time to

pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." And do we not also experience his tenderness and condescension? Is he not the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever? The miracle of Zarephath is repeated each day to thousands, though in a less visible form; and all God's children experience in spiritual things what this widow did in temporal. Great as may be our spiritual poverty, "the barrel of meal wastes not, and the cruse of oil does not fail." He cares, dear brother, that thy faith *fail* not. Mark the expression, "that it *fail* not." We do not read that whole sacks of meal were brought into this widow's house, nor that her cruse ran over. What we are told is, "that the meal wasted not." She received daily as much as she needed. "And the cruse of oil failed not." And so thou, perhaps, wilt receive no superabundance of the joy of believing, so that thou mightest exult and triumph even in the furnace; *too much* might not be for thy good. But this thou art assured of, that thy faith shall not fail; that the merciful and faithful High Priest has gained by intercession for thee, as once for his apostle Peter; and he will daily supply thee with so much patience, each day as at the first, that, though thou mayest occasionally doubt and be oppressed, thou shalt never sink utterly, nor despair. A pious writer says, with equal truth and beauty, "I need just as much patience to wait, as the lamp needs oil, till the day break and the shadows flee away."

Delightful, beyond question, as we have already seen, was the situation of Elijah with the pious widow at Zarephath. But it is not good for man in general that his life should flow on in the same easy channel. Long prosperity makes him proud and forgetful of his native poverty. Lazarus might then be tempted to leave the rich man's gate, and to part with his pilgrim's staff. Long seasons of rest for sacred contemplation are open to the intrusion of self-complacency. Lengthened holidays gratify too much the old Adam; and, hence, a life interrupted by no vicissitude and change is far from being the best for us. Our gracious father, knowing this, makes

provision that there shall be no lack of variety in the lot of his dear children, but pours them, as it has been said, out of one vessel into another, that they may not settle on their lees. Such a change now awaited the interesting family at Zarephath. The "wherefore" was known to God only. The pleasant calm is succeeded by a tempest; the grateful coolness by a burning heat.

Quite unexpectedly, amidst the happiest scenes, and the most refreshing experiences of God's love and presence, a heavy cloud darkened the peaceful cottage. Alas! the widow's son, her only child, doubly dear to his mother, as having been miraculously saved from death by famine, began to complain of illness, and from hour to hour the malady increased. His sickness was sore, heavy, and dangerous; the anguish of the poor mother rose to the utmost; but her tears found no answer. Alas! after a few days, the happiest of dwellings was changed into a place of lamentation and woe. The mother's darling and hope, her dearest on earth, her beloved child, lay stretched upon the bier, pale and cold; and "there was no more breath in him." His soul had returned to God who gave it. This was the trial sent by God against the heart of this poor widow. How hard, how severe, according to outward appearance. And yet there was nothing but mercy behind the cloud. Our gracious God had a purpose to serve with this bitter medicine. It is true "that chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous;" but that "it afterwards yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby," our narrative shall abundantly instruct us.

II. To what end, then, this painful visitation? Yes, to what end? This is what we are always striving to know, to the minutest details. But who are we, that we should seek to explain and interpret perfectly all the dealings of the Lord. Do you not know that the judgments of the Lord are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out! Therefore we ought not to hope to find the key to every

one of his dispensations towards his children, nor too eagerly set our hearts on divining to the letter every riddle of his providence ; but be satisfied with what is written in Moses—"His work is perfect ; all his ways are judgment ;" and stop short with faith, and trust our gracious God, even when clouds and darkness are round about him. Yet, in this visitation of the family of Zarephath, there is not wanting a certain glimmer of light, which enables us to guess at the divine purpose. The widow was a woman of piety ; that admits of no doubt ; but pious only in the sense in which Lydia and Cornelius, and others, were so before the period of their actual conversion and regeneration. She knew the grace of God ; but this knowledge was as yet defective and superficial ; she stood in a certain relation of intercourse with him, but this rested not yet on the true ground, the blood of the promised Lamb of God. She served the Lord ; but more in the manner of Martha, who thought that she required to bring somewhat in her hand, than of Mary, who sat at his feet on the ground with her hands empty, and with open heart, only receiving and wishing to receive. She knew God in his benevolence and love ; but not yet in his grace, since she did not yet know the sinfulness and unworthiness of her own heart ; and the emotions of joy and wonder, which the manifold blessings and deliverances of the Lord excited—those feelings, I say, which were rather natural than gracious, and which she might regard too confidently, as betokening the "new heart," which God demanded, caused her to err from the path of self-knowledge, and blinded her eyes as to her own real and spiritual state before God. In short, she imagined herself to have gained the friendship of God, without knowing anything of "the way to the Father ;" without Mediator ; without Surety ; without the broken heart. And such friendship with God has no reality ; it exists only in our imaginations, and rests more on mistake and self-deception than on the truth. Hence, if the poor widow, with all her piety, could not enter into the kingdom of heaven ; and if, in spite of



all her singing, prayer, and believing, she must at last have suffered shipwreck of her soul, it was necessary that the Holy Ghost, under whose preparatory training she had long rested, should yet farther interpose ; and, above all, open her eyes to see that the love of God is grace, undeserved grace, through the work and merit of another. But how could this salutary and humbling view find entrance, how could it become a rooted and living principle without a previous knowledge of her state of sinfulness, which made grace indispensable ? And this the eternal mercy of the Godhead provides for. We all know the means. She is doubly visited. Two invisible guests break in upon her ; the Lord and the Spirit. The one visits the widow's house ; the other the widow's heart. The one inflicts the calamity ; the other expounds it. The one slays the son ; the other explains the reason why : while the one assails, the cry of the other pierces her soul, " woman, woman, this is a judgment for thy sins." And the woman hears, wrings her hands, and cries out, " Elijah, what have I to do with thee, O thou man of God ; Art thou come unto me, to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son ?" Behold, then, here is a universal, a total overthrow. " Thou art come unto me to call my sin to remembrance." She meant that now God had for the first time seen into her heart ; and this is the right feeling. Yes, thus it is with one when the Holy Spirit begins to disclose to him the " plague of his own heart." At such a moment the soul feels as if it saw the Divine Eye rest upon itself, fixed and immoveable ; and, ah, it rests there like the burning noon-tide blaze, like an awfully bright and devouring flame of fire. Then it will hide its nakedness ; but through all screens and curtains that great Eye breaks through. Excuse and palliation, the shelter of spiritual shame, are utterly burnt up by its flame. The fair array of virtues, sought out and gathered up to bear that Eye aside, are scorched and blackened, and turned into sins. And when the soul would flee away and escape, the Eye of terror goes with it ; and, whether it move or rest, the unaverted gaze

is there. It stands above our bed when we lie down ; it "scares us in visions" when we sleep. In the lonely chamber we find no peace from it ; and amid the world's bustle we suddenly falter and grow pale, as Belshazzar at his feast ; for the great Eye is again upon us, and our rest is fled, our joy is over, our soul is hunted from shelter to shelter in cowering haste, and there is no peace here, and no peace there, but everywhere the Eye, the tremendous Eye, and the voice of thunder, "Adam, where art thou."

Such was our widow's experience. And what was her exclamation to Elijah, in the anguish of her heart ? "O thou man of God, what have I to do with thee ? Art thou come to call my sin to my remembrance, and to slay my son ?" Strange, and even foolish, language ; but, as the language of her heart and feelings, very significant and interesting. As if she had said, "Why didst thou come to me : I owe it to thy visit that God has remembered my sins ; for thou art so holy a man that I and my house were not worthy to receive thee. And God must punish us for being so bold and forward with thee, as if we had been thy equals. Thy coming has brought all this upon me. The merciful God had not so strictly reckoned with me, poor insignificant worm that I am, but in thy society, which has drawn down his attention upon me. In thy holiness has he first seen my sinfulness, and he would not have come so near a poor sinner like me, hadst thou not brought his presence into my house, for He is always with thee." Something like this was the meaning of her language. Foolishness of thought is indeed here ; but, with all this foolishness, what holy simplicity ; what truth of feeling ; what self-annihilation and humility ! The end of God is gained, and the victory is won.

III. Behold, there sits now the poor mother ! What a spectacle of sadness and woe ! Alas, unhappy woman ! There she sits, with her dead son in her arms, as if she would again warm its stiffened limbs at her heart. Her eyes are red with weeping and she wrings her hands ; and

now her tears are for her child's death, and now for the greatness of her crimson sins, and she knows not which is the deeper wound. Pitiab!e state! The prophet sits opposite; and well may his heart also have been touched, and his eye moistened with genuine sympathy and compassion. But he guessed rightly the purpose of this visitation, and had no sooner perceived that God's merciful end was accomplished than he hastened to take measures to quell the storm. He arose, and with firm step and peaceful countenance, that prophesied of good, approached the mother and said to her, "Give me thy son." This composure must have made a wonderful impression on the poor mother. A bright ray of hope must have shone into the darkness of her soul. But see, Elijah, that thou art able to fulfil the hopes thou art raising. Elijah has no fear of the issue in his own mind. He takes the little corpse from the mother's breast, hastens with it into the upper chamber, which was his, lays it upon the bed, shuts the door, falls on his knees, and applies himself to prayer and communion with the Lord.

And now, hark! hark! What a prayer is that with which he presents himself before the Lord; a prayer which assuredly would not pass uncorrected by us; that would not escape the criticism, censure, and condemnation of our wisdom, had we heard it from the mouth of any other than the prophet Elijah. "O Lord my God," cries he, "hast thou also brought evil on the widow with whom I sojourn by slaying her son?" What, Elijah! dost thou speak before the living God of bringing evil? and dost thou dare to come with such a question, nay complaint, before his throne? Yes, Elijah dares. It is in the fulness of his soul. He speaks fresh from the heart; and feels neither scruple nor difficulty. And, if he speak foolishly, he does it in simplicity; if he err, he errs in faith; and, if he treats too confidently with God, he does it emboldened by the blood of the Lamb, and the divine promises. We dare not make ourselves his masters; for his prayer was accepted of God. Was not its import this, "Lord, was it

thy purpose to slay the child ? Impossible. Thou wouldst only lead the mother to repentance by the cross ; and it is accomplished. Shall the child then continue dead ? Lord, let it not be. Look graciously on this poor widow, and recompense her for all her kindness to thy servant ; for I am poor and have nothing. And, Lord, remember that I am thy prophet. In my reproach, thou also art reproached. That thy name may be hallowed, and thy praise increased on the earth, O do thou hear this my prayer." And, having thus spoken to the Lord, he arose and threw himself upon the dead child, and stretched himself on it three times, as though he would say, "I will not leave this child, but will die or live with it." And, having stretched himself for the last time, he cried out, with an earnestness that might move heaven and earth, "O Lord my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come unto him again." A prayer this quite positive and unconditional, without the qualifying words, "Not my will, but thine, be done." And what followed this holy boldness in prayer ? "The Lord heard the voice of Elijah, and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived."

But does not this run directly counter to all our notions and maxims respecting acceptable prayer ? Here we have an unconditional prayer ; a prayer for a temporal blessing ; a prayer for a miracle ; a prayer without limitation, without addition of the clause, "Not my will, but thine, be done ;" and yet God answers it. Yes, our gracious God does not tie himself down to our maxims, and is not bound by our rules. This event in the life of Elijah at Zarephath is similar to one recorded of Luther at Wittemberg. His friend Myconius lay on his death-bed, and wrote him a farewell letter. Luther immediately, on reading the letter, fell on his knees and began to pray—"O Lord my God, no ! thou must not yet take our brother Myconius to thyself ; thy cause cannot yet do without him. Amen." And, after thus praying, he rose up and wrote his sick brother,—“There is no cause for fear, dear Myconius ; the Lord will not let me hear that you are dead. You shall

nct, and must not die. Amen." These words made a powerful impression on the heart of the dying Myconius, and agitated him in such a manner, that the ulcer in his lungs discharged itself. He recovered. "Well, I wrote you that it would be so," was the answer of Luther to the letter which announced the recovery of his friend.

Another little anecdote occurs to me, that I can hardly withhold on account of its simplicity and beauty. The mother of a little girl only four years old, had been for some time most dangerously ill. The physicians had given her up. When the little girl heard this, she went into an adjoining room, knelt down, and said, "Dear Lord Jesus, make my mother well again." And, after she had thus prayed, she said, as though in God's name, with as deep a voice as she could, "Yes, my dear child, I will do it gladly." This was the little girl's Amen. She rose up with a light heart, ran to her mother's bed-side, and said, "Mother, you will yet be well." And she recovered, and is in health to this day. May I also venture, then, you ask, to pray thus unconditionally, even in temporal concerns? No; that thou must not venture to do, so long as thou canst still ask and doubt. But if thou art moved by the Spirit thus to pray, without doubting, without scruple, in a child-like temper and with simplicity of heart, resting on the true foundation and in genuine faith; pray thus without fear. No one dare censure thee. God will hear thy prayer gladly.

"O Lord my God," cried Elijah in his upper chamber, "let this child's soul come to him again." "I will," cried the Lord in return. "Amen, be it so." And the soul of the child came back from the invisible world. The child began to breathe, and lifted itself up, and left the couch of death; and Elijah, with feelings which you can easily conceive, took the child, brought him down from his chamber, and delivered him to his mother; and, in one sentence, short and pithy, as his manner was, said, "See, thy son liveth." He left it to the Holy Ghost to say to her the rest. What shall I now tell you of the feelings of

the poor widow? She sees heaven opened, and that not so much in the recovery of her child that lay once more alive on her breast. No, quite otherwise. She cannot yet think of her child. "Elijah," she exclaims, with inexpressible joy, "Elijah, now, by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth." The word of the Lord: What word of the Lord had Elijah spoken to her? O, that is not difficult to find. We find here, at the end of the narrative, a new key to the whole history. It is clear that Elijah had said something to her in the days of their intercourse, which she had not yet been able to comprehend or to believe. It is not difficult to conjecture what that might have been. Elijah had no doubt soon discovered that the woman, with all her piety, was yet far from standing on the true foundation; and he had also availed himself of the peaceful days at Zarephath to acquaint her with the divine plans for the salvation of sinners, with the doctrine of a promised Messiah, with his blood and merits, and with the necessity of faith in him, and the other points which spring from these great discoveries. These had been to her, as it appears, strange and mysterious things, which she could not rightly appreciate, but pushed aside because there was as yet no need of them in her soul. But a sense of the need of a Mediator and Reconciler was now powerfully awakened in her heart, after she had become conscious, in the furnace of affliction, of her sinful and guilty condition. Elijah's preaching of the cross, and of the forgiveness of sinners through the merits of the promised Surety, was, through the miraculous testimony by which God had sealed anew his prophet and messenger, raised to the rank of divine and indubitable truth, so that she could yield herself up to it with her whole heart, and rejoice and be glad in it. And it was this new faith, this new certainty, this new joy and blessed hope, which expressed itself in her language, "Now I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth." "I know, I feel, I see, I taste it. It is

truth ; yes, precious truth." Now she stands on another foundation. From a fearer of God she has become a child of God. And in the moment when Elijah said to her, "See, thy son liveth," her heart could say something greater still ; "I know that my Redeemer liveth." This was the calm after the storm.

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#### V.—ELIJAH AND OBADIAH.

"He must increase, but I must decrease," was the language of John the Baptist to his disciples, as he perceived, with the greatest concern, that they placed him above Jesus, and with mistaken attachment clung to him, instead of attaching themselves to that "Greater than he," whom John had only preceded as herald and harbinger with the trumpet of repentance. "My children," cries he, "what are you attempting." "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom, and the bridegroom is Christ. I am only the friend of the bridegroom. My office is to announce to the spiritual bride the arrival of her beloved, and to direct her attention to him. When the beloved is come, and the bride hath found him, then is my office at an end. Then the friend of the bridegroom, who standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. This my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease."—John iii. 30.

The Baptist compares his master to the great luminary which makes the day ; but himself to the lesser light, or to a planet, which is visible only so long as the sun is not in the heavens, but then pales its ray, retires into darkness, and vanishes altogether. And he wishes to be nothing more than such a faint star, or a moon in full day, and would gladly drive all his followers who surround him by force from him, that they might fall at and embrace the feet of the Saviour. Gladly would he stand forsaken, and no more regarded, did he but see the sheep resting in the fold of the great Shepherd, and partaking of that salvation which could alone be found there. "He

must increase, but I must decrease." The Baptist meant, that he must decrease not merely in *personal reputation*, but also in regard to his *office*. His office was only preparatory. It was his duty to prepare the way for the spiritual Bridegroom, by preaching the law unto repentance, and to be no more than a "schoolmaster unto Christ," as Moses; only that he drew Sinai and Calvary near together, and blended the trumpet notes of the law with the sweet harp-tones of the gospel.

That the Messiah should come to bring help and salvation to sinners, the disciples of John well knew; yet many so viewed the matter, as if the repentance which they were now displaying, and the life of rigour and poverty which they were passing in the wilderness, as well as the fasting, self-denial, and prayer, which John enjoined, had in itself some atoning virtue, or must at least be laid in the balance as works of *merit*, which they hoped would outweigh the evil of their sins, and the threatened curse of the law. This was, however, utterly to confound the offices of John and of Christ, and to make a very strange mixture of grace and works. The zealous men had not yet been baptised deep enough in the Jordan. "No, no," exclaimed the Baptist with vehemence, "this will not suffice; you must die unto yourselves yet far more thoroughly. Sink deeper into free grace. 'I must decrease.' All that I have enjoined, the sorrow for sin, the crucifying of the flesh, the fasting and the prayer, must lose all worth in your eyes as a means of reconciliation with God. In Christ must ye seek this, and in Christ alone. 'He must increase.'"

Now, in this declaration of the Baptist, the whole mystery of godliness lies wrapped up. Does any one ask what he must do to be saved, "Friend, thou must decrease, and Christ must increase; and thus thou shalt be saved." Does another ask, "Wherein consists the sanctification of the believer?" What shall we reply? It consists in this, that Christ increase, and that the believer decrease. Would another seek to know a certain sign that



he is advancing in the life of grace? We should only need to say to him, "Test yourself by this, whether Christ increase in your eyes, and you yourself decrease." By nature, we are *great* and Jesus *little*; we are *strong* and Jesus is *weak*. So long as we cannot allow Him to be the only Saviour, the Alpha and the Omega, we find the power in our own hands, not in his; the light in our own reason, not in his word; the salvation in our own acquired merits, not in the blood of the Lamb. Suddenly the lighting of divine illumination falls on our benighted heart, and the case is at once reversed. The strong has in a moment become weak; the weak has become strong. The Sun of Righteousness rises in full view before us with healing under his wings, and our poor lunar light grows dim, and sinks with all its blaze of glories, virtues, and moral powers into darkness. As poor debtors we lie weeping on the steps of the throne of grace, and, O, what would we not give if He, the adorable, the only Saviour, would with one beam of grace, with one glance of love, revive our downcast hearts. Then the sinner has decreased, and Jesus has increased before his eyes.

We might, at first, suppose that one who has once been heartily and thoroughly humbled in repentance, would never all his life long be able to lift up his head in pride. But experience teaches us often a very different lesson. If the old man were dead within us, it might be so; but he lives still, although dying as a malefactor on the cross; and not unfrequently he revives, even in the regenerate, with such sad influence, that we are forced to take up the language of complaint regarding them, "Alas, Christ decreases, and they increase." One increases by his ascetic exercises, another by the enlargement of his knowledge, another by his good works, and another by the devoutness of his frames; and I know not all besides. In these they increase, and are in a little become so pious and holy that they stand erect on their own footing, and rest in their own righteousness, and leave the throne of mercy an unfrequented place. With the sense of guilt, the conviction of help-

lessness departs, and hence Christ and his blood decrease in their eyes.

Are we not then to increase in sanctification? Yes, truly! Grow as the palm tree, but, in thy feeling and consciousness, thou must remain like the hyssop on the wall, and become daily less and weaker, and more dependent on an outward prop that bears thee, or thy course is not the right one. The children of God must grow "up unto Him in all things, who is the head, even Christ." Behold, when thou art from day to day more in thy own sight "as nothing," and Christ becomes to thee more literally "thy all;" when thou feelest thyself daily poorer, and embracest more eagerly the riches of thy High Priest; when thou findest thyself ever emptier of true virtues, and the righteousness of thy Surety becomes to thee more and more precious; when thou seest more deeply thine own impotence, and placest thyself as the beggar at the rich man's door; when thou canst offer with thy whole heart the prayer, "Yéa, Lord, but the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from the master's table:" then is this thy decrease a true prospering in grace, and thy poverty and debility in thyself is a growing rich and strong in thy God. *I must decrease*, is the language of the Baptist. It is a law of Christ's kingdom. Whom the Lord loveth, he leadeth from one descent to another. The spectacle of such a spiritual decrease, that Christ may increase, our present narrative presents to us in the example of Obadiah.

1 KINGS xviii. 1—16.

"And it came to pass, after many days, that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth. And Elijah went to shew himself unto Ahab: and there was a sore famine in Samaria. And Ahab called Obadiah, which was the governor of his house: (now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly; For it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water:) And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts. So they divided the land between them, to pass throughout it. Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself. And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him: and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said,

Art thou that my lord Elijah? And he answered him, I am: Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here. And he said, What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me? As the Lord thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee: and when they said, He is not there, he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not. And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy Lord, behold, Elijah is here. And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of the Lord shall carry thee whither I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me: but I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth. Was it not told my lord what I did, when Jezebel slew the prophets of the Lord, how I hid an hundred men of the Lord's prophets by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water? And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here: and he shall slay me. And Elijah said, As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him to-day. So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him: and Ahab went to meet Elijah."

Now that we have dwelt for a while with the prophet under his vine and fig-tree, we are called again to accompany him to the stormy theatre of public life. We have here, I., The manner of his departure from Zarephath; II., The occurrences at the same time in the court at Samaria; and III., The meeting of Elijah and Obadiah.

I. The prophet had now been two years and some months at Zarephath. "After many days," is the language of scripture. To the prophet they may have seemed only a few; yet certainly, when compared with the ordinary course of God's dealings with his children, it was a long time. To lie for two years and some months in succession as it were at anchor in a haven of rest; to have for two years and more a perpetual Sabbath, an unclouded sky, if we except a few passing shades of trouble, and to remain in a state of unbroken peace, with the assaults of the devil and the world shut out, is the lot of few of God's servants. Our stay at Zarephath can in general only be reckoned by hours and days, not by months and years. Perhaps Elijah would have gladly lingered a little longer. His had been a happy time, and still more delightful in its latter end than in its beginning, for the cloud of trouble had left much dew and blessing behind on this quiet hill of Zion. The widow had now become to him a real sister

in the Lord, in the deepest and holiest sense of the word. And who can tell what work of grace may have passed in the widow's son, that Elijah recalled from the dead, and whether from that moment his true life may not have begun. But the word of the Lord came, "Arise and depart." At the brook Cherith, where the wish to leave may naturally have arisen, the command was, "Thou shalt dwell here;" and now at Zarephath, where he would gladly have tarried longer, he receives the call, "Go, shew thyself unto Ahab." Thus must our will and pleasure be often crossed, for it is in general of little worth; and God has better things in store for us than we would choose for ourselves. Let us cast our care on Him, to design and execute the plan of our life, and trust in him as too wise and good to deceive us; for, as Moses says, "He is a rock; his work is perfect; all his ways are judgment." Deut. xxxii. 4. Forward, then, Elijah. "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." Deut. xxxiii. 27.

"Go, shew thyself unto Ahab." What is this but to say, "Leave thy bark, and plunge into the waves; quit thy shelter, and rush into the lion's den." He had to present himself to a fierce and exasperated king, whose rage against him had risen each year with the increasing misery of the country, and had grown ever more deadly and rooted. For three years and a half had Ahab sought to lay his hands on the prophet; had used every effort to track out his hiding-place; had sent spies throughout his own and all the neighbouring states to search for him, and had taken an oath from the different tribes and governments that they had not found him, and yet all his efforts had proved fruitless. What a source of irritation: and what a slur on his royal power. Yes! Elijah had to brave a formidable desire of revenge in the heart of Ahab; and yet his commission is short and decided, "Go, shew thyself to Ahab." Let no one suppose, however, that God ever expects from any of his children what is above human nature, without granting at the same time the supernatural strength; let no one imagine that he calls us to a fight

of faith, without giving us faith for the encounter ; or that he will lead us into any scene of dark trial, without at the same time making provision that we shall be upheld, and kept at least from prostration and despair. Yea, should we ever be forced even to the cry of anguish, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" yet he knows well so to support us, if not by sense and sight, yet by secret faith, that we shall be able to prefix to it a "My God, my God;" and that is enough to keep us from sinking. We are never called to pass through the dark valley, but he is our rod and our staff, and, however thick the darkness may be in which he wraps us, he sends us still some cheering ray or other, so that the night soon draws to dawn. The lamp which he lighted up for Abraham, in his dark journey to Mount Moriah, was, besides the universal belief, "Whatever God does is good," the special conviction in Abraham's breast that the Lord would raise his Isaac again to life. And this sweetened his bitter path not a little. To the patriarch Job was vouchsafed an especially clear and certain and joyful view of the final result of his sufferings, and of the day of resurrection. "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and, though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." And what promise did Elijah receive to lighten his path of faith? "Go, shew thyself to Ahab; and *I will send rain upon the earth.*" "Now, God be praised for it," might Elijah say; "I go as the messenger of peace, and bring a blessing with me;" "soon shall it be otherwise," might he joyfully say to himself, as the horrors of drouth and famine met his eyes by the way. "Courage, courage," he would exclaim in his heart, as faces pale with hunger gazed at him; and when he thought of Ahab, and the rage and malice of his enemies, the thought would presently occur, "Who knows what may take place when I open the clouds once more in God's name; who knows but they will at last repent, humble themselves, and acknowledge the Lord of glory?" Such thoughts and hopes and prospects must have made his sad and perilous path far more tolerable, and relieved many a dark moment

of shuddering sympathy with his unhappy countrymen. Such is the manifold care of our gracious and tender God, that no road be too rough, no hour too dark, for his children.

He is thy Shepherd sure,  
His watch o'er thee shall aye endure ;  
He will on his own shoulders bear,  
For thee already stands heaven's chariot near  
Thy guard and crown ; though faith may wax obscure,  
He is thy Shepherd sure.

“ Go, shew thyself to Ahab ; and I will send rain upon the earth.” That sounds strange ; as if God had had need of his own prophet for the re-opening of heaven ; and certainly he did need him for that purpose. God had, so to speak, transferred the power to open and to shut up heaven from his own hand to that of his prophet, and commissioned him to affirm openly, “ As the Lord God of Israel liveth, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, *but according to my word.*” Much, then, depended on the fact that the rain returned according to the word of Elijah ; no less than his own authority as a prophet, and the honour of the God of Israel. For, had the heavens been opened without his interference, it would have been regarded as a settled point by all that Elijah was a false prophet and boaster, and his God a phantom of the brain ; and the priests of Baal would without scruple have ascribed the deliverance to their idols, and have praised Baal as triumphant over Jehovah. If, then, the whole design of the heavy judgment on Israel should not fail ; if Baal should be brought to shame and the Lord exalted, it was absolutely necessary that Jehovah's prophet should remove the drought by a public word, as a complete proof that his Lord was the true, the living God. Hence the command came, “ Go hence, and shew thyself to Ahab ; and I will send rain upon the earth.”

“ And Elijah went to shew himself to Ahab.” The words are characteristic. Yes, here we find him again ; the same noble man of God, with his firm step and his walk of faith. He went, though surrounded by a thousand dangers ; for he had become an execration of the populace,

and an outlaw to all Israel ; yet he went, and his Lord went with him.

II. While Elijah was taking his departure from Zarephath, Ahab the king was preparing himself in Samaria for a journey. Elijah journeyed for the glory of God ; Ahab, for the sake of his cattle, particularly his horses and his mules, for which he would appear to have had a great fancy. On this occasion we make, as before, an acquaintance of a very pleasing and delightful kind. It is Obadiah, a man of distinguished rank and station. He was chamberlain, or steward, of the royal household, and, at the same time, captain of the royal guard ; being thus at once a courtier and a soldier. We are therefore the more surprised when we read, “ that he feared the Lord greatly.” If the discovery of a pious widow, between Tyre and Sidon, in a heathen country, came upon us with a delightful surprise, how much more unexpected must the appearance of an Obadiah be amidst one of the most scandalous and corrupt courts that ever existed in the world ! Thus we see that piety is no plant which grows, as many think, in the hot-house of human education, admonition, and good example ; for how could a pious man thus have been reared in Samaria ? We see that the children of God are not the products and creatures of favourable circumstances and influences, since the circumstances of society in Samaria were quite adapted to make Obadiah and every one else children of the devil. The Lord “ forms a people for himself, to show forth his praise,” when and where he pleaseth ; “ he has mercy on whom he will have mercy, and has compassion on whom he will have compassion ;” and whosoever is designed to be his child cannot be hindered by adverse circumstances from becoming so. And thus also do the fear of God, faith, and adoption, rank not among the treasures which thieves can break through and steal, which moth or rust can corrupt, or which the tide of wicked company and seductive example can sweep away. Thus Obadiah, by the good help of his faithful Saviour, brought

his treasure, though in an earthen vessel, through all the risks of a dangerous navigation.

“Obadiah feared the Lord greatly.” In truth a noble testimonial, given to this man in the word of inspiration. And truly it was something great to fear the Lord with all his heart at a time when the true knowledge and fear of God had become a scorn and derision of the populace, and the whole nation lay sunk in darkness and idolatry. It was also truly great to remain steadfast on the Lord’s side in a circle where gall and wormwood was the portion of all God’s children, and every weapon was employed to shake their fidelity. The more we think of it, the more extraordinary does it appear to have adhered to the faith in a court where the devil had spread all his gins and snares ; and where all possible temptations to apostacy, all possible seductions to vice and profligacy ran in one full and common stream ; and in a part which drew all eyes upon him ; in an office where his fortune or disgrace depended entirely on the pleasure of the monarch ; in a situation which doomed him to daily intercourse with the most depraved men in the country, the wretched crew of courtiers ; and there, in defiance of all who had influence, to fear God ; and that not by halves, but with the whole heart ; not timourously, but with decision ; not secretly, but without disguise ; for all this lies in that one word *greatly*. O, this was something great and singular. But who is to be praised for it ? The great Obadiah ? Far from it : he would himself forbid it. To the mighty God and the power of his grace be all the glory !

Let the example of Obadiah be often before the eyes of those whose constant complaint is, “that they would serve the Lord willingly, but cannot, from the force of outward circumstances.” Never was objection more unfounded. So, if the outward circumstances were altered, ye would serve the Lord fully ? Miserable blindness ! Ye cannot do it at all, neither in one set of circumstances nor another, except it be given you from above. But the man to whom it is so given serves the Lord in all circumstances.



And what should hinder him ? “ I cannot serve God by reason of the depravity of my heart,” is a complaint that we may well listen to. But, “ I cannot serve him because of this or that outward hinderance ;” this is the complaint of those who lie dead in trespasses and sins. Where the life of God is in the soul, ah, there is a fire that burns through every bushel, a stream which sweeps away every mound of opposition ; then there is a *must* in the soul, which is neither to be confined nor arrested, nor overmastered by circumstances.

Obadiah had already given a striking proof of the sincerity of his piety and zeal for the cause of God. “ By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another.” And by this touchstone Obadiah’s discipleship had been tried and found genuine. As Jezebel, the embittered enemy of the God of Israel, was making every effort to extirpate his prophets by fire and sword, Obadiah interposed for their rescue, and took a hundred of the prophets, or their scholars, and concealed them by fifties in a cave ; and stopped not here, but visited them in their dark and lonely refuges, and fed them with bread and water. It was a daring act, and might have cost him dear. But the love of the brethren constrained him. Go, then, my brethren, and do likewise. Through the influence of the Ahabs and Jezebels of our times there is no longer a lack of such as, from despotic laws, or caprice of ungodly employers, are persecuted, cast off, and exposed to suffering for conscience sake. A frightful rage is re-awakened, both on many a throne and seat of justice, and in many a house and home, against those who will not bow the knee to Baal ; and this persecuting spirit shall grow fiercer and fiercer. Many a preacher will yet have to leave his pulpit ; many a teacher his chair ; many a mechanic his workshop, because he is a Christian. Then gather yourselves close together, ye children of God, for defence and succour. Imitate Obadiah. The foe shall not have the triumph of a malicious joy at the tears and sighs and clasped hands of the children of Israel. Here we too are within sight of the

struggle ; and what is ours by the Lord's goodness, let us impart it to our brethren, who are purchased with the same blood.

To return to our narrative. "And Ahab," it is said, "called Obadiah," to give him a commission, which he was to execute in company with the king. What a singular circumstance that a man like Obadiah should be in such high favour with a despot like Ahab. He could certainly never for a moment have dissembled his religion to please the tyrant ; and it must have been known to the king and queen and the whole court that he was one of the most zealous worshippers of Jehovah. But the excellent man appears to have had grace given him, by his walk and conversation, to stop the mouths of the wicked ; and, by the steadfast truth and transparent purity of character that he always displayed, to restrain even the bitterest of enemies and scoffers within the limits of a certain reverence. Ahab was no doubt well aware that he had no second Obadiah among his officers of state ; and they must all have perceived that no one had so much confidence placed in him as this Israelite of the old school ; and, though the king might join in the ridicule of his religion, he felt that he could on no account do without him.

Yes, there is something in every believer that forces from the bitterest adversary a secret acknowledgment of their dignity ; a light that condemns and punishes their own darkness, and from which, in the bottom of their hearts, they cannot withhold a certain esteem and admiration. Nor is it an infrequent case either, that, in times when jesters can no longer be of service, the hated sect comes suddenly into favour, and rancorous opponents of the gospel are for once glad that they have in their neighbourhood some Galilean of whom they may make a chosen counsellor.

"Go into the country," said Ahab to Obadiah, "unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks ; peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts." Miserable man ! An anxious

solicitude for the preservation of his horses, and the keeping up of his stud, was all that the divine judgment, now continued for three years and a half, had awakened in his soul! "Why should ye be stricken any more, ye will revolt more and more." Neither crosses nor blessings, neither signs and wonders, nor corrections and judgments, are able to awaken the spiritually dead to life. Nothing can do so, but the almighty power of divine grace. Is not this the lesson of daily experience? How often, alas! do we think of some one we know, that now at last he shall certainly become an altered man—such sore and humbling chastisements *must* soften him, and bring him to reflection. *Must*, did we think? We anxiously mark his temper, and seek the trace of change; and, behold, where we hoped to find at length a thought of God and of eternity, the man is full of his horses and mules; and instead of the holy emotions which we looked for, instead of repentance and prayer, and serious meditation on the great and eternal concerns of the soul, there is nothing but a thick swarm of the most pitiful cares and occupations, which flutter and flutter around the soul, till they and it together are swallowed up in the awful seriousness of eternity. "Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him."—Prov. xxvii. 22. O thou almighty grace, have mercy upon us!

Obadiah readily obeys the command of his king. His office required submission; and in the present case his conscience had nothing to urge against it. But how could a man like Obadiah bear to continue in the service of such a ruler, and in the society of so thoroughly corrupt and wicked a court? The question, we may well suppose, could not be an easy one for himself to solve. "In the world ye shall have tribulation," says our Lord; and this tribulation, this feeling of strangeness in an ungenial element, was doubtless not unknown in Obadiah's experience. Many an hour may he have mourned and sighed in secret: "Woes me, that I am constrained to sojourn in

Meshech, and to dwell in the tents of Kedar ;" and often must he have felt the noxious atmosphere lying like a blight on the growth of his spiritual life. But Obadiah could not adopt the convenient maxim which advises flight where it is painful to continue at our post. "My God," he would consider, "has placed me here ; the reasons are known to his infinite wisdom ; and it is an easy thing for him to preserve me, even in this den of lions." And thus he would remain, for the Lord's sake. Ye that are in Obadiah's situation, go, all of you, and do likewise. However much the evil which you must be eye-witnesses of, however great the opposition you meet with, however you may be scoffed at, derided, oppressed, and maltreated, let that be no reason at all to you to shrink of your own will from a post of duty where the Lord has placed you. Endure for the Lord's sake, till he himself set you free. If you are cast out by violence, or if a change of circumstances necessarily brings along with it a change in your situation or post of service, then retire with a good conscience, for the Lord has called you. But, till then, endure, and bloom as the rose among thorns, and be as a preserving salt in the midst of decay, and stand as a beacon-tower in the sea, with far-reflected light, and thus ye may, by God's grace, guide some poor storm-tossed souls from the waves of this world's troubles into the peaceful haven. And, however the billows may foam around you, "He that keepeth Israel will neither slumber nor sleep, and the angel of the Lord is about them that fear him. His faithfulness and truth is their shield and buckler. Blessed are those who put their trust under the shadow of his wings."

III. Ahab and Obadiah set out in different directions. They will explore the country, and see whether there be not some verdant spots to be found in the valleys, and among the springs of the land. That the king took this journey in person, was ordered by the Lord, that he might have brought before him the whole picture of misery and woe which the land now presented, if possibly the scene

might melt the obduracy of the tyrant's heart. But we know already how totally it failed of making the right impression; and, instead of an over-awed and humbled sinner, we shall see him return the same monster of rage and cruelty: who, instead of "rending his heart" in contrition, turns his anger against the rod that smites him, though he had himself bound it up in the bundle of his iniquity.

But let us leave the monarch and follow the footsteps of his pious servant. Yonder he journeys along, on the deserted and dreary road, sad and sighing, and bearing all Israel in his compassionate heart, and in his prayers to God. Alas! how the scene of desolation, which stretches on all sides around, grieves his very soul! The whole land lying like a scene of pride and glory ravaged by fire, and everywhere as with letters of flame written in the ashes, "Who can stand before his anger!" But what affects him most painfully of all, and pierces his heart most deeply, is the spectacle of an apostate race, which, as if armed with triple obduracy, could stand up against the thunder of such judgments, and live on unmoved in the most wanton carelessness and baneful security. Ah! how that stirs his spirit within him! How can he restrain a holy outburst of zeal? The children of the kingdom are in this like their crucified Lord, that they bear the sins of the world on their heart, and must often repair the breach which the ungodly have made. But happy are such persons; they are those whom the man in white linen, with the ink-horn at his side, in the prophesy of Ezekiel, was directed to with the commission, "Go through the city of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry for all the abominations that are done in the midst thereof."—Ezekiel ix. 4.

As Obadiah travels on, absorbed in these gloomy reflections, behold, a man comes forth before him, leaning on a pilgrim's staff, of commanding figure, with firm step and grave countenance, and a rough mantle hanging over his shoulders. Obadiah is amazed! What a rencontre! He cannot yet believe his eyes. Is it possible? Yes, it is he!

O, joyful surprise ! Elijah ! Elijah ! To recognise the man of God and to fall in reverence at his feet is the work of the same moment. O, delightful meeting ! For three long years no one had seen or heard aught of Elijah, and the pious remnant were disposed to believe that God had secretly caught him up into his eternal rest. And now he is here once more, as suddenly as if he had fallen from heaven. "Art thou that my lord Elijah ?" asks Obadiah with profound respect, as he bowed before him. And Elijah, in his own brief manner, replies, "I am, go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here."

These words produced a strange effect on the excellent Obadiah. They evidently cut him to the heart, put his courage and zeal to a sudden and too trying proof, and exhibited him in all the weakness, doubt, and despondency of a poor child of man. It was a salutary lesson, however, of his dependence upon the grace of God for everything. It was learned by him amid a great conflict of emotions, and its various steps are full of instruction to us. No sooner are the words of the prophet uttered, "Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here," than his faith fails him ; his courage begins to glimmer like an exhausted lamp ; fear comes upon him like an armed man ; and he appears to his own mortification, and I trust to our profit, in all his emptiness and weakness. "What have I sinned," says he, "that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me ? As the Lord thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee : and when they said, He is not there, he took an oath of the kingdom and nation that they found thee not. And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here. And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of the Lord shall carry thee whither I know not ; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me." Ah ! how many words are here : how many words ! This is not the language of calm faith, but of human fear and despondency. And what then does Obadiah fear ? Ah ! he sees frightful

things in imagination. He thinks, that, when he proceeds to Ahab with the information that Elijah is there, the enraged tyrant will immediately take all measures to get the prophet into his hands; and, as God would doubtless prostrate the malignant purpose, that the Spirit of God would carry him away, as may at other times have happened to the saints of God, and as we know was afterwards the case with Philip in the wilderness. When then Ahab failed to find him, he would wreak his displeasure on Obadiah; and on the charge that he had deceived the king, or violated his duty in not apprehending the prophet, or that he stood in secret league with him, he would lose at once his office and his life. These were Obadiah's fearful apprehensions. The dictates, alas! of flesh and blood. He looked like Peter at the winds and waves; but had lost sight of his Lord.

But let us hear farther. He now begins to speak of his piety,—“I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth. Was it not told my Lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of the Lord, how I hid an hundred men of the Lord's prophets by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water. And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy Lord, Behold, Elijah is here; and he shall slay me.” “I am a pious man,” he means to say, “my garb and office must not mislead you. I am none of the apostate crowd. I have continued faithful to the Lord. Can you prevail on yourself to expose a brother in the faith to the most appalling danger of death.” Yes, Obadiah, so thou sayest; and we believe it all. Thou art a pious man, that is certain, and thou remainest so, even amid all thy weakness; and who can take it amiss that thou speakest of thy piety, and recountest thy deeds of faith. This is not the language of spiritual pride in thee, but of fear and despondency. But rejoice with us, Obadiah, that thy salvation rests not on thy faith and piety, but on a quite different ground, that lies without thee; else how sad would be thy case with all thy goodness!

O yes, our best religious attainments in this world are

and must be but as the strength of infancy, or the resources of poverty. If *our* faith, *our* courage, *our* devoutness, *our* assurance, were the steps of the heavenly ladder, how frail a footing would they be to the heights of glory. And this their rottenness we must be taught ; and it is salutary for us to learn to build more firmly and exclusively on the true foundation, that lies without us, in the merits of Christ, and which stands eternally sure. Our only refuge and consolation in life and in death is, and alone can be, the grace of God in the blood of the Lamb ; and, that we may embrace it alone, the mercy of God makes provision that the memory of our sins shall be always re-awakened, and our misery by nature never depart from our eyes. Do we think ourselves perfect in courage ? straightway comes danger and a storm over our head, and we learn that we are but as reeds shaken by the wind. Do we boast of our faith ? immediately a touchstone is applied, and we see that its strength was all a dream. Do we feel ourselves absorbed in the richness of our devotional experiences ? soon our heart is dried up to a waste of sand, and we must confess that Christ alone is the fountain of living water. Do we imagine that we have conquered all fear of death, and that we shall one day shew how a Christian should die and pass into eternity ? the Lord gives us from afar a glimpse of the grim King of Terrors, and, alas, the frightful prospect makes all our heroism at once grow pale. Do we dream of high steps that we have reached in the scale of holiness ? soon the wind of temptation is let loose on us, and we are left only a moment to our own standing, and, alas, we are again “in the depths,” and all our boasting is gone, and there remains for us, as for every other dear child of God, nothing but the prayer of the publican,—“God be merciful to me, a sinner.” “If I wash myself with pure water,” says Job, “and make my hands never so clean, yet wilt thou plunge me in the ditch, and my own clothes shall abhor me.” And why does this happen to us ? “That we may decrease, and that Christ may increase.” This di-



vine proceeding may be indeed bitter in the mouth, but the profit and sweetness shall surely follow.

The Lord had now attained in the case of Obadiah the end of his purpose of love. His self-humiliation was complete, and the light was again suffered to shine on him. In the moment of conscious weakness and shame, Elijah said, "As the Lord of Hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto Ahab to-day." This composed all his fears; and with shame and confusion of face he parted from the prophet, and had now sufficient boldness to tell his sovereign, in the words of his message, "Behold, Elijah is here."

Through more and more decreasing,  
Christ leads his saints unceasing,  
High up the heavenly road.

## VI.—DELIVERANCE OUT OF THE MOUTH OF THE LION.

"Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad," was the injunction of Jehovah to Laban the Syrian, when he so "hotly pursued after Jacob," as if he meditated revenge. Gen. xxxi. 24. His tongue was at once tied, his hands bound, and his fierce resentment turned into kindness.

Happy are we if we are of "the seed of Jacob," and have for our protector the Lord our Redeemer, "who hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon, who shutteth up the sea with doors and bars, saying, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther; who stilleth the raging of the sea and the noise of his waves, and the madness of the people." A proof of this will be found in that part of the history of Elijah which shall this day engage our attention.

1 Kings xviii. 17—20.

"And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim. Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred

and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table. So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel."

The appearance of the prophet which we are now to consider is a striking illustration of his integrity and fearlessness as a man of God. We have here, I., The wonderful protection which he experiences; II., The unjust accusation which he suffers; III., The fearless reply which he makes; IV., The secret power which he exercises.

I. Obadiah, recovered from his alarm, and re-assured by the language of Elijah, went his way, and sought out the king, and said to him, "Elijah is found; he is in such a place." This was like a spark among gunpowder. A frightful explosion was to be expected. A flood of gall and poison, of cruelty and revenge, had collected in the tyrant's heart against the man of God. Scarcely had Obadiah, with fear and trembling, delivered his message, than Ahab rose to set forth in his own royal person. His rage made him neglect all form and usage, and he hurried, like a raging beast of prey, to meet the hated prophet. What is to be expected? Elijah can be saved only by a miracle. Elijah sees the infuriated monarch approach. But he stands erect, and quails not; the living God is his strong tower, his shield and buckler. And now Ahab has reached the spot, and the prophet stands confronting his arch-enemy. And now, Elijah, thou art lost for ever! Lost! Nay, the danger is already over. Truly a wonder! The sword cleaves to its scabbard; the eager arm is palsied; the teeth of the lion are broken. No stroke falls, no arrow flies, and, instead of an appalling outburst of vengeance, there follows nothing but the feeble question, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" Not one word of thunder,—“Thou art the troubler of Israel;” not one impassioned curse or threatening; only the question, the feeble question, as if the fire-breathing volcano had burnt itself out, and only a little smoke could rise above its summit. Thus, the Lord can stop the mouths of lions, and enable his people to tread on serpents and scorpions,

so that nothing shall hurt them or make them afraid. Yes, the same God who surrounded Elijah like a wali of fire, and broke the envenomed shafts of Ahab and Jezebel in the quiver ; the same God who rescued Moses from the hand of Pharaoh, and Daniel from the den of lions ; who delivered Peter from prison and from bonds ; and carried Paul through the persecutions of his bitterest adversaries without dismay ; and who, by means of a poor Augustinian monk of Wittemberg, put the might of emperor and pope, of princes and clergy, nay, and of the devil himself, to confusion ; this God is alive for evermore, and will be the rock and fortress of his children and servants now as in the days of old. Were He not alive, let me tell you, we should hear of many a sore evil, even in our days, for there dwells yet many an Ahab in Israel, and many a Jezebel in heart too, in high places and in the lowest. The spirit of persecution may smoulder in the ashes, but it is not extinct. The blood of the witnesses would again flow if the hand of the Almighty were withdrawn but for a little from the necks of his enemies. For as many as have the seal of the Lamb, not merely in their hearts, but on their foreheads, as many as belong to the number of those who come to Christ, not by night, but in the open day, must excite opposition and the spirit of molestation ; and that we dwell so peaceful and secure in our tabernacles, though in the den of lions, and between the lands of the Philistines and the children of Amalak, is due to our great Protector and Saviour, who neither slumbereth nor sleepeth, who is ever armed for our defence, who encamps around us with his strong legions of angels, and who is, and will be himself our bulwark. In eternity we shall first discover, to our great astonishment, how many lions' mouths the Lord has stopped for us, and from how many enemies' hands he has delivered us. Happy are we in this tower of strength ! How secure is our dwelling amid the "munitions of rocks." They may storm as they will, the Ahabs and the Jezebels, with the malignant servants of Baal. Let them assault us as they will, armed with rage

and malice, we shall still fear nothing. Our God can smite with palsy the hand that is already lifted up against us. So Elijah found it, and so shall we, in our own measure, experience the truth of the wide-reaching promise,—“Behold, I give unto you power to tread on scorpions and serpents, and over all the power of the enemy ; and nothing shall by any means hurt you.” “Yet,” adds our Lord, “in this rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you ; but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.”—Luke x. 19—20.

II. The protection which Elijah experienced was exactly of the kind which the saints of God are wont to experience ; and in like manner he could regard the accusation brought against him, that it was he who was the troubler of Israel, as one of the certain marks that he indeed belonged to the people of God. “Art thou he that troubleth Israel,” said the wrathful monarch, laying thereby on him the whole blame of the heavy distress of the people, instead of on himself. It was an act of outrageous injustice. But, from the beginning of the world, the children of God have been obliged to submit to the same evil. It is a principal part of the cross, which we must bear after our Lord and Redeemer ; and, though we thereby deserve no higher place of honour in the kingdom of God, yet we crucify effectually the “old man” within us.

It very often looks, indeed, as if we were the storm-birds and harbingers of misfortune ; the disturbers of peace, and such as turn the world “upside down ;” as could not but be the case with Elijah, since the famine fell upon Samaria at his word. How often does it appear as if fire and flame were bound to our feet, and war and tumult followed our steps. At one time we remove peace from the families in which we live ; at another time we banish harmony from the circle in which we move. At one time a believing son must, to his unspeakable distress, excite the displeasure of his unbelieving parents, so that the dwelling of love is suddenly changed into a scene of incessant strife and

violence ; at another, a converted daughter must witness, with tears, that she has, against her will, cast the brand of contention among those who are nearest her on earth. The whole family is suddenly driven out of its pleasant course of quiet and cheerful life, and all peace is torn up by the root. Sometimes, when a minister of the gospel displays the doctrine of the cross to his people the effect is as if a mountain had been cast into the sea. The waves swell ; there is tumult and wild uproar ; the agitation spreads on all sides, and everywhere there is excitement and feverish interest. The sleepers awake ; the dry bones are shaken. On one side is wrath and menase ; on the other, exultation and triumph ; and the flock is divided against itself, and broken up into parties. How often, indeed, does it happen, that bold and zealous servants of God, aiming at nothing else than the return of strayed sheep, "to the shepherd and bishop of their souls," have kindled such a fire, and occasioned such heats and heart-burnings, that the world has been scandalized, and worldly power stepped into to preserve good order. And in all such cases, we are the scapegoats, the troublers, the criminals ! That the abyss, out of which the smoke of confusion and dissension arose, lies in a quite different quarter ; that the fire which inflamed the excitement is holy, and just, and good ; and that the source of mischief was to be found solely in the hearts of the ungodly, the unbelieving, and the haters of the light ; are suppositions which occur to nobody. The cry is obstinately maintained against us, "You, you are the troublers of Israel." And can we expect our denial to be listened to ? "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant greater than his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more they of his household ! Therefore fear them not ; for there is nothing hidden that shall not be revealed, nor secret that shall not be known."

We are called, my brethren, to be the salt of the earth,

by our life, as well as by our testimony, our word, and our confession ; a salt in the corruption of this generation, each in his own sphere. Ye believing fathers, among your children ; ye masters, among your servants ; ye equals, among your equals ; ye friends, in your friendship. Being made the salt ourselves, we should season others. The process must be painful, and accompanied with excitement ; for if all remain still and motionless, it is a proof that the salt has lost its savour. But if there be a stir and movement around us, and if one eagerly inquire, "What must I do to be saved?" and another, in a paroxysm of rage, exclaim, "Ye are the troublers of Israel," it is the wished-for token that we are still the salt of the earth, and that the salt has still preserved its virtue.

"Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" asked Ahab of the prophet ; and in a certain sense, it must be confessed, he was so. He had, in holy zeal, implored of God the heavy judgment on Samaria. The children of God have a share in God's government of the world, which is often greater than they themselves are aware of. Did the adversaries know of it, they would be bent on our extermination. How many an opponent has even in this life been dashed to the ground by the iron rod of the King of Zion, for no other reason than that he bore arms against God's people ? And how many a persecutor has been judged and cut in sunder, from no other cause than that he persecuted the little flock ? How many a blasphemer has had his mouth stopped by a visible judgment, just because we pray, "Hallowed be thy name?" How many a family and land must suffer through our prayers to the Lord, "that he would save them as a brand from the burning, be it by weal or woe?" Yes, did our enemies know how many things take place on the earth, simply for our sakes ; whether for the strengthening of our faith, our deliverance from danger, or for the honouring of our prayers ; did they know what influence the "quiet in the land" exert on the fate of individuals and of whole nations, and how, and in what sense, the great Captain of the Lord's

host, to whom we have sworn fealty, has made us all not only priests, but kings, their wrath against us would know no bounds ; and they would cry out, in a very different tone, "Ye are they that trouble Israel?"

III. Elijah, in his reply, appears as much the man of God as in the former course of the interview. "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" was the question. And what now should the prophet answer? He stands before his mortal enemy; and this enemy is the monarch of the country, an arbitrary despot, who needed only to give the word, and the prophet's head lay at his feet. Shall he humble himself? Excuse himself? Cry for mercy? Others might stoop thus; Elijah cannot. Shall he take to falsehood or cunning, to flattery or servility? Shall he conceal the true cause of God's judgment on the land? That be far from him. He is a man wont to make conscience of the truth, which is black indeed, but comely, like the tents of Kedar. It might have been excusable to have mollified and soothed the king with the prospect of coming rain and happier days. But the time is not yet. The prophet exercises a just reserve. His sole aim is to bring the tyrant, with his whole people, to judge themselves, to humble themselves before the living God, and give him the glory; and this aim is dearer to him than life. He knows whither he is going; and death to him has lost its terrors. And therefore he answers, "I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim." A bold and fearless reply, rising fresh from the heart, and above all praise!

Such language as this is seldom heard on earth. The world is full of flatterers and dissemblers; they swarm, not only in the palaces of the great, but also in the circles of the poor, and even in the pulpits of the church of God; and men in rough prophets' mantles and leathern girdles, who are bold enough, for their master's sake, to defy the father of lies and all his works, and to take the truth as a

staff in their hand, a shield on their breast, and a sword in their mouth, even at the hazard of sharing Elijah's reproach, and the Baptist's dwelling and fare in the wilderness—O, such men are rare jewels ! O ye ministers of Christ in the pulpit and out of it, why do we complain of the little fruit of our labours, of the scanty harvest of our sore toil and travail ? Rather let us complain of our own hollow dealing, and be humbled in the dust for our own faint-heartedness.

We should see greater things, were not the salutary and awful "Thou art the man," so entirely extinct among us, and buried in Nathan's grave. We preachers in this vale have the character of a singular closeness of dealing ; and perhaps it is so in comparison with the multitudes of hirelings, who everywhere at the present day eat the bread of the church, and repay her in the currency of lies and false doctrines. Yet, what is this freedom of speech, when closely examined ? Is it anything great to preach God's word freely, where the doctrine of the cross (thanks be to God !) has gained a certain mastery ? Or to set forth so fully the doctrine of human depravity, where another doctrine would empty our churches, and be besides a deviation from our articles of faith ? I tell you, were Elijah, the Baptist, or Paul here, you would hear the trumpet give a very different sound. Then the individual would be re-proved and condemned openly, and there would be no more respect either of persons or of stations. How many an Ahab of the present day would be thus addressed, "I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord !" How many a Jezebel would then be told to her face, "The unclean shall not inherit the kingdom of God !" How many a publican, "Exact no more than that which is appointed you !" How many a Herod, "It is not right for thee to have thy brother's wife !" How many a Felix, how many a Drusilla, in the midst of us, who now hear only smooth words, would be forced to submit to one closet-sermon after another, from rough and unspar-



ing lips, of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come !

Well may you pray, my friends, that it may be given to your teachers to improve better the knowledge which they have from God by virtue of their office, and to discharge more faithfully the duty committed to them by the Most High ; to threaten, to reprove, to use great plainness of speech, in season and out of season, in the cottages of the poor, or in the halls of the great and powerful and noble in the land. Truly we want neither the weapons nor the full commission to employ them. We have a heaven to promise and a hell to alarm. We come forth as ambassadors for Christ, and as the stewards of the mysteries of God. We speak not of ourselves, but what One who is greater than all gives us to speak. We appear surrounded by a cloud of witnesses as the deputies of the King of kings, and have the right to announce our message to sinners with, " In the name of God "—" Thus saith the Lord." O, the dignity of our calling ! the sacredness of our position ! O, that it might inspire us more thoroughly, and make us like Elijah and Nathan, like Paul and John the Baptist ! Should it then be that we scattered with the fan of truth whole crowds of former friends as chaff, perhaps we should attract by the gospel trumpet from the publicans and sinners more than enough to repair the loss. Should the measure of our reproach and trouble be doubled, perhaps the fruit of our labours and our harvests in the Lord's vineyard would be doubled too. Yes, my friends, we must all repent together ; we, your teachers, and you with us, for you are each in his sphere called to Nathan's office. O, it is a melancholy thing to think that our social life is in general so conducted, that it is no better than a web of falsehood, dissembling, and man-pleasing, and a continued cry of peace, peace, when there is no peace ! Truly, that is a worthless delicacy, with which we, instead of reaching the potsherd, stand aside and allow our friends to die of their sores, for fear of giving pain. A hateful love is it which, instead of call-

ing loudly on the sleeper by the mouth of the pit, lulls him into a deeper slumber, to spare him the horror of awaking, and us the reproach of breaking his rest. May the Lord kindle a pure flame of love in our hearts, a love which, when the cause of truth, the honour of God, and the salvation of our brethren require it, can speak in tones of thunder, regardless of the displeasure of others, and of pain to itself; and yet a love in which no strange fire shall mingle with what is holy, and we shall not, as is too often the case, break to pieces, in our zeal, both tables of the law.

“I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father’s house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim.” What is the sin which Elijah expressly holds up to him as the proper source of the whole calamity? Is it his intemperance, his covetousness, his frivolity, his unchaste life? No, it is his shameless unbelief; it is his wanton departure from God’s word and statutes; it is his blasphemous contempt of what the living God had revealed and appointed in the world. Blessed God, if this be the deepest crime, and the blackest guilt in God’s sight; if for this cause he visits nations and countries and cities with fire and sword, what have we to look for in an age wherein the forsaking of God’s statutes is become the fashion, and a heathenish rationalism has found its way into the very cottage and the workshop; when the language of the wicked servant, “we will not have this man to reign over us,” is becoming always more general, and the sound of error is heard from so many pulpits and seats of learning, from the highest to the lowest, as a real voice of Baal; in which true Christianity, the belief of the forgiveness of sins through the blood of the Lamb, is so frequently branded as *mysticism*; and the real life of the soul in the Holy Ghost, the life of love to the Saviour, and walking in his footsteps, is so often decried as *fanaticism*; and when Baal has so many worshippers, who, in the gloom of Pantheism or Atheism, scatter their incense in his nostrils, and build him altars!

How will it at length fare with such a generation, if we do not in good time fall weeping before the uplifted rod in the hand of the great Preserver of men? And what kind of days have we sooner or later to look for in a country where more than *one* Noah preaches the righteousness of God, where more than *one* Jonah calls to repentance, where more than *one* of Zion's watchmen sounds the trumpet without ceasing, because he sees the sword approaching, and only a little band enlist under the banner of the cross; while thousands upon thousands treat the blood of the covenant as an unholy thing, hold the word of the Lord in derision, and reject his ordinances without shame before their eyes, and bow the knee to all manner of shameful idols, and sacrifice to the abominations of the Moabites and the Amorites! What vials of wrath must at last be poured out upon this favoured region? Will it be enough that the Lord visit us with loss of employment and want, with stagnation of trade and business, with pestilence and with drought? Will he not see it necessary to come with still heavier judgments? "Woe unto thee, Chozazin! woe unto thee Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capernaum, that art exalted to heaven, shall be brought down to hell." O that my people would turn from their evil ways, and from the foolish work of their hands; that the Lord God might repent of the evil concerning us, and turn from the fierceness of his anger, that we perish not!

IV. "I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim." Thus spake Elijah, "the man without fear or reproach,"—and no sooner has he spoken thus than he began to make preparations for a scene that has not its like in sacred his-

tory. Jehovah is about to shew, by "signs and wonders, and mighty deeds," that he is God, and that there is none else, and Baal is about to be overthrown in one day. "Now, therefore," said Elijah, authoritatively, like a representative of God, "Now, therefore, O King! send and gather to me all Israel to mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table." He speaks, and Ahab obeys, and it is done. Behold how matters are reversed! The servant has become the lord, the lord the servant! the subject enjoins, and the monarch obeys! Such is the unseen sceptre in the hands of the children of the Ruler of spirits, and the secret, marvellous power which they exercise through the Eternal Spirit that dwelleth in them. O, it is nothing rare that simple men of God, void of all outward authority and influence, have by *one* word, nay, by their mere appearance and aspect, "stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, turned to flight the armies of the aliens!" And this power is peaceful and unobtrusive, as becomes the children of the kingdom. The master sends them forth, "as lambs in the midst of wolves," and says, "He that smiteth thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other also." They are not clad in mail of iron, and the "weapons of their warfare are not carnal." They must, "when reviled, revile not again," and make no use of that temporal sword which the princes of this world bear. To them is committed a totally different might. How shall I describe it? Is it faith, the victory that overcometh the world? Is it the light of the Holy Ghost raying through them, whose temples they are, and who manifests himself at all times as the Spirit of the mighty God? Enough; it is a certain divine *something* in them that works wonders. Therewith have we seen timid children overawe the most furious enemies, and defenceless sheep disarm their bitterest persecutors. This royal mark of the children of Israel,—we might call it the star of their nobility,—which shines through the garb of their humility, is more than all

the skill of the prudent, and all the wisdom of the wise, more than the honour of all nobility, and the prowess of all might. It enables the simplest souls to discomfit the greatest philosophers, and to bring their false boasted subtleties to confusion. This nameless *something* which Christians carry about with them, this mild lustre of the jewels of God, this spark of heaven's own fire, which lights up their whole being as the twinkling beam of the everlasting lamp that breaks through the veil of the heavenly temple, this sign of the Son of Man, and seal of the Lamb upon their foreheads; this is the supernatural armour in which the servants of God do exploits, prove their sonship, gain their victories, "bind the princes of the earth," judge the rebellious, silence the scoffers, shame the blasphemous, chain the unclean spirits, and cast down Satan himself, "as lightning from heaven."

"Notwithstanding, rejoice not in this, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." The joy of dominion can easily fall into the danger of spiritual pride. The joy of admission into the family of God, which his grace has vouchsafed us, is more pure and separate from the flesh; it softens and humbles. The one leads easily back to self; the other keeps us at the Saviour's feet, and tunes the soul to his praise. The one easily darkens the inward eye, and hides our own poverty from view; the other, resting on the unspeakable glory to which we are called, is like a light in whose brightness our own unworthiness cannot but appear. The joy over the spiritual might that fills us is precarious and changing; for our powers may be lost or crippled by sin; the joy over our citizenship in heaven is enduring, for we know the foundation of the Lord standeth sure, and hath this seal, "The Lord knoweth them that are his," and "He abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself." O, happy they whose names are written in the Book of Life; and doubly happy they who know that they are written there. Amen.

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## VII.—ELIJAH AND THE PEOPLE ON MOUNT CARMEL.

Who among us can be ignorant of the celebrated decision of Solomon, in a remarkably difficult case that was brought before him. Two women presented themselves with an infant, to which they each asserted a mother's claim; the one affirming that the child was hers, and that the child of the other having died, she had taken the living child from her, and placed her own dead child in its place; the other maintaining the exact contrary, and both requesting the king to decide the matter.

But how was it to be done? The wise man did not fail of an expedient. He calls for a sword, and on its being brought, he says, "Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other." Then spake the woman, whose the living child was, unto the king, for her bowels yearned over her son, "O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it." But the other said, "Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it." You are aware how the king, from the expressions of the two women, settled the dispute and decided the cause. 1st Kings iii. 24—27.

Why do I recal this incident to your minds? To remind you of the tender compassion of our God, who judges of his children as the true mother in this history. He will have no division of his children between himself, and the devil or the world. He will have his children, soul and body, as a whole living sacrifice, or not at all. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." And again, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me;" and once more, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead:" and in another place, "If any man come to me, and hate not father and mother, and brother and sister, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." What a holy jealousy! What it is to be

wholly the Lord's, we shall this day learn from the word and deed of that man of God, whose zealous soul was "as the chariots of Israel and the horseman thereof."

1 KINGS xviii. 21—24.

"And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word. Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under; and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord; and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken."

A great and ever-memorable scene is here to be unfolded. The ancient controversy, whether there be a God that rules in heaven, and whether Jehovah or another be that God, the Lord is about to decide himself; and that by a judgment that can not only be heard with the ears, but also impressed on every faculty of sense. In this passage, however, we see only the preparations for this astonishing decision. The sublime spectacle is yet to follow.

We have here a sermon of Elijah, brief, but weighty; and it brings before us, I., His expostulation; II., His challenge; III., His strength of faith.

I. We have in imagination left the city of Samaria behind us, and taken our stand on the lofty summit of mount Carmel. Far beneath our feet roars the sea, which stretches away beyond our vision to the boundless distance. On the other side, our view ranges over the river Kishon, into the wide plain of Esdraelon, where Mount Tabor, and, still nearer, the little town of Nazareth rise before our eyes; farther beyond glimmers the lake of Genesaret in the blue horizon, and on the extreme north we descry the mountains of Lebanon, with their rounded and cloud-capped summits. A magnificent scene! "The excellency of Carmel," is the scripture description of it; and a short time ago, the phrase was repeated in the letters of a missionary, who had preached the doctrines of the cross on

its heights. On this fruitful mountain, there are to be found at present, besides a Christian monastery, a Turkish mosque, and many subterranean chapels, caverns, and grottos, applied to purposes of worship. On the anniversary of the memorable day here recorded, crowds of Mahomedans and Christians flock together to bend the knee before their common saint, Elijah. How would the prophet treat these priests of Baal, could he revisit once more the ancient scene of his zeal and conflict?

To-day, then, we find him on the heights of Carmel. There he stands, surrounded by a countless multitude of the people of Israel. Here are four hundred and fifty priests of Baal; yonder, the four hundred priests of the grove, a noisy and profligate crew, who ate at Jezebel's table. Here the idolatrous monarch, in person, with his pompous train of courtiers; and all around the poor, perishing, deluded people, crowded together to the number of many thousands, all awaiting with eager curiosity the coming wonders.

And now, when they are all assembled, the prophet comes forth before them all into the midst; a plain man, known by his hairy mantle and his leathern girdle. He looks around him with a cheerful and undaunted countenance, and when all is hushed in silence, he opens his mouth before all the people and addresses them, "How long halt ye between two opinions? If Jehovah be God, follow him; but if Baal, follow him." A fearless and solemn appeal! What was its effects? The people make no answer; they are silenced by the power of truth. Elijah, you perceive, blames his countrymen for halting between two opinions; for wavering now to the one side, now to the other, and for dividing with unsteadfast hearts their worship between Jehovah and Baal. With the royal family, the court, and the priesthood, the case was different; they were confirmed idolators, devoted with heart and soul to the profane and impure service of Baal. The people, however, could not yet have quite forgotten the mighty works of Jehovah to their fathers in former days.



They could not, therefore, resolve on a complete apostacy, but sought to persuade themselves that they were not in reality idolators, even in worshipping an idol, as this was but an object through which they adored the one true God. They mingled the service of Jehovah and Baal together, and invented a religion in which they could on the one hand give themselves up to all the foul abominations of heathenism, and yet, on the other hand, preserve the show and the self-complacent feeling of still walking in the steps of the faith of their fathers, at least in substance, though they might depart from it a little in form. What subtlety of self-deception ! What strong delusion to believe a lie ! What contemptible double-heartedness ! These were the people to whom Elijah turned with his appeal.

And let me tell you, were Elijah now preaching among ourselves, we also should be forced to hear many a severe sermon upon halting, wavering, and instability ! He would not be able long to bear in silence the double-mindedness and inconstancy that prevail among us in such a multitude of forms. It must be confessed, that in the midst of us there are not wanting decided spirits either ; we find them on both sides ; in the paths of death, and in the way of light and life. As we have those among us whose motto is in deed and in truth, " All for Christ ;" so we have a crowd of others who will know nothing of the Saviour, who have turned their back on his gospel, and renounced his friendship once for all. The golden calf of short-lived pleasure and honour is dearer to them than the Lamb of God with his blood and sacrifice. They offer incense to Satan, are slaves of the flesh, bid defiance to hell-fire, and will venture in the devil's name to step into eternity—if, indeed, eternity be not all a dream. These are persons of decision, men of character, who know what they are doing, and see what they are aiming at ; they do not halt ; no, they walk with firm step straight onward to the worm that never dies, and the fire that never shall be quenched. And there is a great multitude of this class, old and young, in all ranks and conditions of life, as vessels of wrath, re-

served for the manifestation of the righteous judgment of God at the great day. The rock of Jacob shall fall on them, and grind them to powder. But will it fare better in the end with those who have pitched their tent between the two camps, and who would fain belong to Baal with the one half of their hearts, and with the ether to Jehovah? Would that this race of waverers did not form the majority among us! But, alas! it is so. Halting, of one kind or other, is the order of the day, and decision in the divine life is a rare jewel. Woe unto thee, thou deceitful generation, that thou thinkest it a possible case to share thy love and service between God and his enemies, that thou waverest to and fro in thy purposes, and bowest the knee this hour to the Lord, only that in the next thou mayest stand as a suitor in the harlot-chamber of the world! Who is the supreme good? Is it the Lord? Why then is he not thy all in all? What means, then, this accursed hunting after short-lived gains and perishable jewels? What this idolatrous thirsting after vain honours and earthly splendours? What this anxious care for riches and ease, this panting after worldly comforts and pleasures, and this pagan lamentation over temporal losses? If the Lord be God, let him be thy treasure and thy care, and let all thy love and longing be towards him. But if the world be the supreme good, if it can save and bless thee, redeem and comfort thee; then, I say, love the world, and lose not thy time in singing and praying, in church-going and Bible-reading, and other routine of holy service. Be at length assured of thy standing, and be something entire in thy life, and being. Woe unto you, ye that halt between time and eternity! Ye shall halt yourselves at length into hell, and there is no remedy! Decide ere it be too late! If the life of man be shut up within the bounds of time, and nothing is to be looked for in a hereafter, then, I say, be your watch-word "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die;" then make the most of your days, and give free course to your appetites; and do not befool yourselves in losing time with your so-called preparations for eternity. But if you

have here no continuing place, if there be a city to come, and an eternity without limit or end, why should you then loiter by the way? why set up your tents as for ever by the path of your pilgrimage? Then be nothing more than wanderers, passing travellers; then cast away every weight and hindrance of your journey; tear up every obstruction of your path; and count all but loss and folly, that ye may enter in at the straight gate, and that the word *Eternity* be not at the last a word of thunder to you. Yes, methinks it is no lost labour to sacrifice all cares to this one, how we may escape an endless misery, and be made partakers of an endless happiness! But to try to live it out, half as children of time, and half as children of eternity,—from this life of halves there results a total death. Woe unto you, ye that halt between the service of truth and the service of falsehood, between the wisdom of your natural reason and the wisdom of God; who now, as it suits your humour, believe the Bible more than yourselves, and now yourselves more than the Bible! If the word of God be true, then submit your reason to it in all points, even in those which cross and thwart the bent of nature; then believe not merely its promises, but its threatenings, though it should speak of a judgment-seat before which we must all appear, and of a shutting of the kingdom of heaven against all who are not born again. But if ye are *wise* by Nature's teaching, then be so entirely; maintain yourselves in your wisdom; give the book of God to the winds; only halt not, for that is folly and unreason; and learn to mingle light and darkness no more together. Woe unto you, ye that love to balance between Christ and Anti-Christ! Is Christianity the cause of God? then decide for it with soul and body, and count all its reproach as fame and honour, and walk forth free and openly under the banners of the despised race of Israel; and quit the noisy haunts of the frivolous children of the world, and make yourselves no more like them, but relinquish their pleasures and gaieties for ever; and wheresoever the kingdom of God is forcing its way, and there is stir and movement in the field of

the dead, and the cry of new life is abroad—then join not you in the enemies' taunt of extravagance and fanaticism, but rejoice rather that the smooth surface of everyday form is broken up, and that a spiritual festival, with its singing and harping and dancing before the ark of the covenant, is again about to dawn upon the Church. But if Christianity be fable and falsehood, then why do you waste a word on its defence? Be your curse on it, and pass over wholly to the ranks of Anti-Christ. Woe unto you, ye who halt between yourselves and Christ! Who is your saviour? who is your surety? who is able to redeem your souls from death? Is it yourselves? Then let this Jesus be a Jesus for others, and let me not rest as if my salvation were in his hands. But if he be the only way unto the Father, how should I have rest till my whole heart is converted unto him! Then must I seek to hold him fast, and to cling day and night to his embrace, and to make him the centre of my thought and action! But ye are neither cold nor hot, as if ye did not yet know whether he or you is the saviour of the soul. Beware, ye lukewarm, that he spue you not out of his mouth! And why do you waver between his righteousness and your own? Which will avail you in the judgment? Your own? Then cast yourselves upon it, and give up your vain talk of the merits of Christ. But if it be the righteousness of Christ which alone avails you, why do ye return so often to the mire of your own miserable virtues, and pour forth, even in the shortest interview, those masses of pitiful detail which are meant to shew what pious persons you are? how much good you do? how diligently you read the Bible? how regularly you go to church? how strictly you observe the Sabbath? What means, O waverers of every class, your wretched indecision? Be one thing or the other. I tell you, with this halved and sundered nature, ye are an abomination to the Lord. "No man," says he, "can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other; ye cannot serve God and Mammon."

“He that is not with me,” says the same Lord, “is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.” And what says the apostle? “Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you.”—2 Cor. vi. 14—18. “How long,” cried Elijah, “halt ye between two opinions. If Jehovah be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” And the people must have thought that the man of God was right. And ye also, I am persuaded, will not be able to reply to the truth of God which has now been set before you; and of you the language of the text will hold equally true, “And the whole people kept silence, and answered him not a word.”

II. Whether Jehovah or Baal be God, is not for Elijah himself to decide. God himself will utter a word in the controversy, and Elijah cares not to anticipate its mighty impression. Meanwhile he continues his address. “I, even I only, remain a prophet of Jehovah; but Baal’s prophets are four hundred and fifty men.” God be thanked, he was not the only man of God then living, but the only one who appeared longer on the theatre of public life; the only one who still defended the cause of Jehovah against the enemy: the rest were either slain or banished, or concealed in dens and caves of the earth. Now, reflect on Elijah’s position! With the exception, perhaps, of Obadiah, there was not in the whole immense crowd on mount Carmel a single brother in the faith; not *one* man of like mind, or like attachment to the common cause. No one on whom he could lean for support; no one to encourage him by his looks, or inspire him, by sign and gesture, with confidence. Ah! you know how

the heart sinks when one stands thus all alone in the crowd of total and unsympathizing strangers. You know how the soul is then damped and staggered, how the tongue cleaves to the roof of the mouth, and how the breath of life itself, to say nothing of the bold spirit of the martyr, is ready to expire. But the prophet blooms in this desert like a rose, and burns like a torch in this noxious atmosphere. No, his heart is at ease, he breathes freely, and his tongue does not falter. He has great joy in testifying of the name of the Lord before this intractable multitude, since his whole soul is fired with zeal for God's honour. We, in like circumstances, would not be so easily daunted or silenced, did we care somewhat more for the glory of God than our own credit, and somewhat less for our own comfort and ease. But the God of all grace is not dear enough to our souls, and we have too little in our hearts of that fervent love to him which many waters cannot quench, nor the floods drown. Yes, I know well the cause of your failure. When a bold and joyful confession of Christ is to be looked for from you, it is only then, when one or more are present who will applaud the testimony. But, alas ! it for the most part stops there. Ah ! brethren, I know the weakness and deceitfulness of your hearts, for my own has betrayed your secret to me.

“I, even I only, remain a prophet of Jehovah ; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men.” He is entirely surrounded by enemies, despisers of all divine revelation, infidels and scoffers, among high and low, learned and unlearned. You are aware, my dear brethren, how a situation like this, among none but unbelievers, especially if they are men of worldly credit, prudence and accomplishment, must act injuriously on our faith, and how easily the doubt insinuates itself, “Am I then the only person in the right, and are all these in the wrong ?” You know how readily one is then tempted to make the strait gate somewhat wider, the narrow way somewhat broader, to leave this and that article out of the essentials of salvation, and, in a word, to be not so very precise and ex-

act in the cause of the gospel. But Elijah appears to have been far above the reach of such influences from without. It was to him nearly all one where he stood. He thought here and yonder alike; his views were not darkened, his convictions not weakened by outward circumstances, for he knew the grounds of his faith to the bottom. And though the whole world had thought otherwise, and he had held to his faith alone upon the earth, he still had not abated one jot or tittle of it. No, not for an hour! He would then, too, have stood fast by his conviction, and boldly made the challenge that he alone was in the right, and the whole world in the wrong, for he could say what not many can say,—“I know in whom I have believed.” Every point of faith which he maintained was gained by a struggle of experience, and had thus so struck its roots, and fastened its hold, that it could no more be bent and shaken by every wind of doctrine.

“Baal’s prophets are four hundred and fifty men.” “Yea,” he means to say, “and if they were as many thousands, what then? We shall soon decide the point with them.” What language of bold defiance! But there is a confidence in God which all God’s children may put on; a confidence in which we can say with Luther, “If there were as many devils as there are tiles on the house-tops, yet will I go forward;” and with Elisha, “Behold, they that be with us are more than they that be with them.” Yes, were there but a little more of this confidence amongst us, the hands would not so soon hang down, and the knees become feeble. We could then set our face as a flint, and make our forehead as iron. Who shall assail us since God is on our side, and a wall of fire round about us? All before us may indeed fear; but we need tremble before no created thing, either in heaven or on the earth. Can the devil harm us? He fears not indeed the purple and crowns of kings; but the prayer of the least of all saints puts him in dread and terror. Can death harm us? Truly, the voice of this king of terrors can shake those who are proud and lofty as the cedars of Lebanon; but the

dying-bed of the least in the kingdom of heaven is a sacred fortress, which repels his onsets. Can sin prevail against us? It is indeed the devil's snare, and fills for him the prison-house of woe; but neither can it affright us. The snare has been broken by the Mighty, and we are escaped. And what shall the wicked and the adversaries do against us? Our King shall dash them to pieces, as the potsherds of earth. Therefore be confident in the Lord; for "the way of the Lord," says Solomon, "is right, and the upright shall walk therein; but the transgressors shall fall therein."

III. The people upon Carmel are on the full stretch of expectation. Nobody yet knew what was to take place. But Elijah hastens to prepare the scene for the stupendous display of Jehovah's glory. "Let them therefore give us," said he, "two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, and put no fire under; and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on the wood, and put no fire under: And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of Jehovah; and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken." They agreed to the proposal; some from curiosity to see what would happen; others actually in the hope that Baal would gain the victory; perhaps some few also, from a real desire to know for certain whether there was a God at all, and which was the true God. What astonishing boldness in this step of Elijah! What does he not put to hazard by it? The whole heritage of the true God in the world; as, in case of failure, faith would no more have been found upon the earth. But to Elijah, it seemed no hazard at all; he thought to himself, "The God of all grace cannot forsake me in such a trial." And since he thus reasoned, and was as a child in faith, he had leave to act thus wondrously in God's name. Yes! faith can nerve us to many a venture.

The world has already received many an answer of God



by fire, so that it ought by this time to know who is the true God ; but it will not retain him in its knowledge, and therefore many an answer by fire must yet be sent. By fire he answered the first sin ; by fire that gleamed partly from the sword of the flaming cherubim, and partly burnt downward in their hearts, like the fire of Tophet. By fire he spake to Sodom and Gomorrah, when they sought to forget him ; and the shores of the Dead Sea retain, after many thousand years, the traces of that word of power to this day. By fire he confirmed his promises to Abraham, when, in the darkness of the night, a smoking furnace and a burning lamp passed between the pieces of the sacrifice. Out of the fire of the burning bush he spake to Moses, his servant, as a man with his friend. With fire he answered his people on Sinai, when the top of the mountain smoked and burned, and the awful words, "thou shalt," and "thou shalt not," were uttered in thunder. By fire from heaven he answered David, after the numbering of the people, and burnt up the offering on the newly-erected altar, in the eyes of all. By fire he answered the prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the temple, "so that all the children of Israel saw the fire come down, and the glory of the Lord upon the house, so that they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground." By fire did he visit Jerusalem in wrath, after he had visited it in vain with water and with blood. And with fire shall he come once more, as he has ever done, with the fire of the great day of trial, to burn up the dross of his people, and to devour his enemies like stubble ; and then shall heaven and earth be cast into the flame, that the taint of sin may be purged out, and that a new creation may rise from the mighty furnace, in unspeakable transfigured glory.

"And the God that answereth by fire, let him be God." We have received answers by fire from him, with which our hearts yet thrill in amazement and joy. Think of the answer given more than one thousand eight hundred years ago. Mankind stood in despair ; saw heaven shut above and hell open beneath, and knew no refuge ; for their sins,

more in number than the sands of the sea, cried to God for vengeance : and who should avert it ? And when there was now no more help or comfort, no more counsel or deliverance, and no one knew how he should escape the reward of his deeds, and reconcile an angry God, then the clouds were rent in sunder, an awful fire broke forth from the open heavens, descended upon Calvary, and consumed the Lamb of God on the altar of the cross. Then we knew the deep mystery of our redemption ! An answer was come to our desponding questions ; an answer by fire.

But there remained yet a sore question behind. Where shall we find the faith, that embraces the sacrifice of the cross, and secures us a part in the great atonement ? Where shall we find the source of that life, to which we must awake as from the dead ? The question was asked, and, behold, a second answer sounded forth ; an answer by fire. The heaven again burst open ; tongues of fire sped downward ; streams of life flowed ; the fountain of all-saving blessings was opened to the world ; the Spirit was poured forth upon the church. And with these tongues of fire the Lord still answers to this day. He answers by fire among heathens and Christians ; among princes and the poor of the earth : in the isles of the nations, and “ afar off upon the sea.” Wherever he comes, streaks of fire play behind him—the flames of the new life. Hills melt, rocks are rent, deserts bloom. Shall he then not be our God ? “ Behold, I am come to send fire on the earth ; and O, would that it were already kindled.”\*

The true God answers by fire. He that has not yet experienced this has no god at all, or his god is an idol, a barren notion, a shadowy phantom. So soon as he approaches us, we are ready to exclaim, “ Did not our hearts burn within us ? ” Wherever he goes, the seven candlesticks blaze around him ; and all his words to us are dipped and baptized in fire. Our hearts descend to the pit when he preaches us repentance. Our souls are swept as by a storm when his word comes home to them.

He rebukes, and the pillars of our existence tremble ; he speaks comfortably, and our hearts are melted in love ; he promises, and the soul dissolves in longing ; he requests, and our compliance is a fervent necessity ; he commands, and a burning law is enstamped upon our hearts. Such is his language to his people ; and if he proves his existence to his enemies, he does it amid the brightness and the terror of fire.

O, that he would then write upon our hearts, that he is Jehovah, with the bright letters of his love ; that he may not be provoked at last to write it in our ashes, with the ever-burning traces of his wrath. For to all gainsayers he will answer and proclaim his name by *that* fire, which is prepared for the devil and his angels ; that every creature, whether in the songs of bliss, or the wailings of despair, may give him the glory ; and that the voices of the redeemed, and of the vessels of wrath "that have fitted themselves for destruction," may rise in one concert, "Jehovah is God ; and his name endureth for ever." Amen.

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#### VIII.—THE FIRE ON CARMEL.

"To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." Thus David addresses the people of Israel ; thus the apostle Paul, the churches of the early Christians, and thus do we in our present assembly address you : Dear brethren, "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

What then is this hardening of the heart ? It is a state of blindness to the divine testimonies, and of obstinate resistance to sufficient light and motive. Hence it is evident there can be no hardening where there is no divine revelation, no sound of law or gospel, no call to repentance and conversion. Hardening of heart arises from the rejection of one call of grace after another, and the overcoming of one holy influence after another by unbelief. Hence, the more rich the dispensation of the word of life

is, in a country or a congregation, there is the more occasion, not only for conversion, but also for penal hardness of heart.

“To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” There are unbelievers in the midst of us, in whose hearts there “is no good thing found towards the Lord God of Israel.” They have succeeded hitherto in turning aside many a thrust of the sword of the Spirit by the panoply of unbelief, and in shaking off many an arrow that had fastened in their conscience. It is so, that to-day you are to hear the voice of the living God utter a testimony to himself, such as few of you have yet experienced. Should you succeed in shutting your ears against this voice, and in evading, through unbelief, this marvellous evidence, O, what shall then move you? You are a great step farther from salvation, and nearer the judgment of invincible hardening. Wherefore, “To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.”

1 KINGS xviii. 25—40.

“And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first; for ye are many; and call on the name of your gods, but put no fire under. And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us! But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made. And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud; for he is a god: either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked. And they cried aloud, and cut themselves, after their manner, with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them. And it came to pass, when mid-day was past, and they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded. And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him; and he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down. And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name; And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord; and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed. And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt-sacrifice, and on the wood. And he said, Do it the second time: and they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time: and they did it the third time. And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water.

And it came to pass, at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me; that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again. Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt-sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God. And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there."

Now, brethren, what say you to this sublime record? Is not the voice of the Lord powerful? Is not the voice of the Lord full of majesty? Yea, "the voice of the Lord divideth the flames of fire, breaketh the cedars of Lebanon, and shaketh the wilderness." May the Spirit of the Lord then come upon us, and bear us in thought to the heights of Carmel; make us worthy spectators of the august scene, so that to-day the "very stones may cry out," and the desert rocks open their mouths in singing; and many a carnal heart may confess this day for the first time, "Jehovah, he is the God! Jehovah! he is the God!"

This narrative does not admit of a formal division. But let us contemplate in it, I., The God of the blinded, infatuated world; and II., The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.

I. Elijah has made his proposal. Both parties are to sacrifice a bullock: he, and the priests of Baal; while each is to call on the name of his God. "And the God," said Elijah, "that answereth by fire, let him be God." And the whole people assented. "It is well spoken," cried they, with one voice. And now the mighty hour was come, that should decide for ever whether there be a God in heaven, and what is his name! Elijah loses no time. "Ye prophets of Baal," cries he, "begin; choose ye first your bullock, and call on the name of your gods." This precedence belongs to you, "for ye are many;" ye have the majority on your side. Yes, and it remains true to this

day, that the number of the children of Cain, of Baal, and of Belial, so far exceeds that of the sons of God, that they could, as it were, swallow and eat them up as bread, if it depended upon numbers. "Ye are many." Yes, as the weeds to the plants; "vessels of wrath" in myriads; whole towns and villages; whole taverns, ball-rooms, and theatres, for one little dove that is found "in the clefts of the rocks." Alas, for the fires of judgment which shall burn all up as the dry stubble! True it is, that in this world they have the upper hand; and not without reason, for the prince of this world is their monarch. Hence they are honoured and looked up to; and we are the offscourings of the people, at whom every child is taught to hiss in scorn; they are the great and the wise, and we are the confessed fools, whose wisdom is taken to task by every school-boy of this godless and infidel generation; they are the favourites in society, the leaders and dignitaries in public life, and we, unhappy mortals, are neglected and disowned by all! They are "they that justify themselves before men," and have the applause of the whole crowd on their side, and the voice of the greatest geniuses and of the most brilliant talents, and of the mighty oracles in all reviews and journals; and we, why, if any one but once takes our part, he thinks he is condescending to a work of great mercy and compassion. We sit in the poor criminal's chair, before the great public, and have no other advocate than Him, who was "in the form of a servant," and who, instead of defending our cause at such a bar, reminds us that his kingdom is not of this world, and puts us off to the future for our consolation. What wonder is it then, that we appear utterly wretched and ridiculous to the world, when we appeal to this Advocate, whom they think they have long ago put to death upon the cross, and silenced in the tomb? Well, be it so; ye sons and daughters of the father of lies! Seek your happiness, if you will, under the sceptre of the old serpent! be the first, and sit on high, "for ye are many!" We envy you not; for who would grudge the victim, that is to bleed to-morrow,

his last store of fodder ; or the gay trappings and badges of the sacrifice ; or the triumphal shout of the blinded crowd that attends him to the altar ?

To return to our narrative. The priests make preparations for the sacrifice. They were forced to it, on account of the people. Probably they would rather have let it alone. If they were really not sure of their cause, or had betrayed the people into the service of Baal against the light of their own consciences, alas ! how deplorable must now have been their plight ; with what faces of perplexity, and pitiable uneasiness of mind, must these false impostors have cut up and dressed their bullock, so that they might have wished themselves in the victim's place, only to escape the unspeakable scorn and shame which they were now obliged to join in bringing on their heads. But such a season of agonising shame and confusion in the face of their congregations shall one day overwhelm all hypocritical and lying priests, however they may have deceived and misled the people, at their altars, or from their pulpits, or **by their private influence !** The sacrifice is prepared ; and now a loud cry is raised, that made the whole mountain echo, "O Baal, hear us !" And when one is tired and hoarse, another takes up the cry, "O Baal, hear us !" And if his faith is wearied out, straightway a third collects his expiring hopes into a desperate effort, and shrieks out, "O Baal, hear us !" One fixes his eyes on the clouds, to see if they will not yet rend ; another looks downward into the depths of the rocks, to see whether the longed-for flame will not burst forth ; a third hearkens intently to hear it rumble and crackle in the ground beneath him,—**"O Baal, hear us !"** But let them groan and yell as they will, till they are hoarse and wearied, and stand with open mouths and forlorn faces from morning till noon, and from noon till the time of the evening sacrifice, the cry of their frenzy goes no deeper than the clefts of the rocks, and dies away among the echoes of the mountains. "There was neither voice nor answer, nor any that regarded." For all that Baal does, they are no better than if all the fire in the

world had gone out ! At last they begin to be frantic, and to act like madmen ; they spring forward, leap upon the sacrifice, then whirl and caper around the altar in wild orgies, with distorted and fanatic gestures. But still no one in heaven or on earth takes notice of their frenzy. A miserable deity, is it not, this Baal ? a mere nonentity !

But tell me, might not one think that this was intended for a picture of the favourite deity of the present enlightened century ? Yes, just such a dead vanity it is, such a dumb idol, in which there is neither voice nor hearing nor attention—that is the god of the Bible-hating and perverse generation of our day ; that is the god of most of our philosophers and poets, the god of our politicians and journalists, the god of very many of our seminaries and universities ; that is the god of our modern scientific associations and institutes ; and hence, that is the fashionable god of our polished circles and assemblies, and of society of the best quality, in which it is disreputable to have even the appearance of adhering to the God of the Bible, and where the name of God or Lord is almost as jealously avoided as if it were a word of shame and infamy ; and where, instead of these blessed names, the terms, “ Heaven,” and “ Fate,” are now become the current style—expressions behind which an ungodly heart in vain seeks to hide its apostacy. They would like to hear nothing of a word of God, know nothing of divine grace and revelation, and hearing of prayer, and operation of our God upon the heart, and communion with him, and experience of His presence. These are to them mere fable and absurdity ; these they regard as vain sounds, the fruit of priestcraft and credulity ; a proof, surely, that with their god there is neither voice nor answer, nor hearing ; a proof, surely, that they understand by their *heaven* and *fate* a pure nonentity, and have for deity a dead painted idol, a dumb, sluggish, drowsy Baal, who, God be praised for it, exists only in the dark chamber of their distempered brain. Alas ! for this boasted pure idea of God ; the god of many so-called Deists and Rationalists,



the god of so many of our illuminated dreamers ; the god of our romance-readers and fashionable critics, and religionists of the newest school ! A god this who knows not black from white, and allows a thousand sins and infamies to pass with a smile, if they only do not offend against the rules of police ; a god in whose book of law the service of the flesh is a permitted indulgence, falsehood and deceit a prudent dexterity, adultery a pardonable weakness, and the most licentious dance an innocent amusement ; a god to whom it is absolutely indifferent what our creed and opinions are ; a god to whom every villain dare confidently appeal as his witness and his judge ; a god of whose favour the most reckless may rest secure ; a god in whose presence one need be ashamed of no loose discourse, blush for no impure lust, and tremble for no blasphemy or obscenity ! Behold, this is thy god, thou untoward generation ! I speak not of all, but I speak of many. This is thy so-called "Universal Father," as thou wouldst fain imagine, and bring thyself to believe,—yes, thine, most wise, Bible-scorning, enlightened generation ! Woe unto you ! for how will this god leave you to your fate when distress and anguish cometh upon you, when death with his fatal sting transfixes you, and the fire runs through your veins, that, according to the word of truth, shall never be quenched ! Then may you cry till you are faint, "O Baal, hear us !" But there will be neither voice nor answer, nor hearing, for the Baal in whom you have put your trust has no place at all in the realms of being, and was never more than a phantom of the brain. As the Lord liveth, my brethren, it is the truth which the Holy Ghost speaketh of the apostle John, "He that abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath no God."\*—2 John 9. Tremble, then, all of you together, who have not the God of the Bible, who have not God in Christ ; ye are Atheists ; search into the bottom of your souls and you will find it so. Yes, *Atheists*.

To return to Carmel. The outcry and frantic noise

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\* German Version.

seems as if it would never end. Elijah stands by, a spectator of its horrid absurdity. It is easy to imagine his various feelings, how his heart would at one moment be like to break with compassion, and then a holy indignation would rise within him ; and then, again, the matter would appear so foolish and ridiculous, that he could not restrain his scorn. " Yes," he cries out amid the tumult, " Cry aloud, for as much as he is a god : Either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is on a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked." Perhaps he has his head and hands so full that he neither hears nor sees you. He may be a-musing, or a-busy arranging the thunder and lightning, or from home and in the chase, or he has laid down to take a nap ; cry aloud and awake him ! Yes, just as there are doubts which should be repelled not with reasons and arguments, but, as a pious old father says, with a peremptory " fie ! fie !" and just as there are cares which are best removed by a smile, so there are follies and delusions to which a little lively sarcasm or irony is the best reply. Where arguments lose their force, and all rational proof has been tried in vain, there remains no other weapon of truth than ridicule, which, when used to the glory of God, as here by Elijah, and, among others, by Isaiah, in the admirable irony of his 44th chapter, may produce a most salutary effect. What shall I do with obstinate folly and self-conceited ignorance, which perhaps has never been at the pains to read the gospel, and yet condemns it unheard ? Shall I strive and labour to persuade them of its truth, when, besides, I know that " all men have not faith," and that it is not transferable like an article of merchandize ?" No ! let me break off with the counsel, " Tarry at Jericho till your beards be grown," given in sadness or in scorn, as the case may be. Such a shaft of irony may stick longer in the conscience than a serious appeal ; and we know that it is said of God himself, Psalms ii. 4, " Ho that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh : the Lord shall have them in derision." Do you perhaps object that it argued human weakness in

Elijah to be able to mock and use irony during the momentous scene on Carmel ? I affirm, on the contrary, that it shewed a divine confidence worthy of all admiration. For what a cheerful and undaunted courage does it suppose ! what an inward repose and serenity of temper ! what a firm conviction of the justice and truth of His cause ! what a certainty of success, and that the living God will not forsake him ! The faintest scruple, the smallest uncertainty, would soon have put all his irony to flight. Thus, also, it has been given to many Christians in the joyful elevation of their faith to repel the devil with scorn and ridicule, to calm the troubled conscience with a smile, to triumph over the shame and reproach which they encountered with a certain play of humour, and to utter pleasantries of defiance against death and the grave when in their very grasp, as enemies long ago unstinged and trodden under foot. Let no one take upon him to school these cheerful Christians, because they do not hang their heads like a bulrush and afflict their souls. That would be to arraign His grace who has "filled their mouth with laughter and their tongue with singing." Let us weep with those who must weep in God, and rejoice also with those who can rejoice. There is, says Solomon, "a time to weep and a time to laugh."

Elijah's irony raises the vexation and frantic violence of the priests of Baal to the highest pitch. Now Baal *must* hear them ; he *must* come forth, whether he will or no. The outcry is changed into a howl ; they lay hold of knives and lancets, and lacerate their bodies according to pagan custom till they stream with blood, as if they had retained by tradition something of the article of faith, that "without shedding of blood is no remission." With their sinful blood they think to move Baal, and to force an answer ; then they begin to prophesy, that is, to make all kinds of enthusiastic motions, to rave as if rapt in vision, and to mutter forth horrible incantations. "But still there was no voice nor answer, nor any that regarded." All was in vain ! And, brethren, in your worship of the

living God, you will not succeed by such forced excitements and unnatural ecstasies and devotions. Believe me, though you force up such frames ever so high, Jehovah has no pleasure in these sacrifices. Though you roll your eyes, bow your heads to the earth, pray yourselves hoarse, and fill up day and night with your services of will-worship, in the idea that these are the things to propitiate God, you will find yourselves rewarded only by an awful silence, and there will be neither voice nor hearing, nor answer from the Most High.

II. From morning till the time of the evening sacrifice has the insane folly lasted. Then Elijah comes forth, simple and straight-forward, with calm look and steadfast bearing, so that every one must have said in his heart, "That is the prophet of the true God." "And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him." On the top of Carmel lay the ruins of an altar built in Israel's earlier and happier days, but thrown down by Jezebel. This Elijah restored and consecrated anew, as if he meant to say, "May God restore thee, O Israel, thou sadly dilapidated sanctuary of the Lord!" For all that Elijah now did was an instructive discourse by signs. He took twelve stones, according to the number of the twelve tribes of Israel, in order to rebuild with them the altar in the name of the Lord. As much as to say, "God will remember his covenant and his promise, and will again restore Israel to his favour when the Leader of the people is come." About the altar he dug a trench, large enough to contain two measures of seed, as if he had said, "O Israel, return to thy happy singularity and isolation, in which thy God hath shut thee up, and separated thee from the beginning!" He then laid the wood in order, cut up the bullock, and laid it thereon. "Ah!" might not his soul now sigh, "that thou wouldest speedily prepare thy Sacrifice, thou Priest of God, that Sacrifice which shall perfect for ever all them that are sanctified!" He commanded that water should be poured on

the wood and on the sacrifice, that the miracle might be the more unquestionable, and no one might afterwards be able to object that fire had been secretly applied. "Fill four barrels with water," said he, "and pour it on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood;" and he said, "Do it the second time; and they did it the second time;" and he said, "Do it the third time; and they did it the third time; and the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water."

The preparations are now completed. A secret thrill runs through the assembly; a deep silence pervades the whole multitude. And it came to pass, at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice—(our third hour, or the ninth of the evangelists—solemn and momentous hour!)—that Elijah, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith, comes near to the altar, clasps his hands, turns his eyes upwards to heaven, while his whole heart and soul and spirit go with them, and in the name of the promised Son of Man, who is the way to the Father, opens his lips in prayer, and such a prayer! "Lord God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again." Elijah calls God by his name, "Jehovah God," which he had chosen for himself in the beginning, to denote his condescending and compassionate love to sinners; and by his name, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, that he might thereby excite in the hearts of the backsliding people a humbling remembrance of all the goodness that this God had made to pass before them and their fathers of his free grace. Elijah prays, "Let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel." The honour of God is his ruling passion, the source and end of all his zeal. "And," he adds, "and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word." This he might well request with confidence, for his honour and that of his master were in

this entirely one. And with what intense earnestness did he add the words, "Hear me, O Lord, hear me!" And what was the import of a plea, with whose energy all heaven might be stirred,—“That this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their hearts back again.” Thus, in this prayer, as in all that the prophet did or said, we find two great ends before his mind, the glory of God and the salvation of the people. And what shall we most admire in this prayer? The prophet’s zeal for the renewed display of God’s glory, or the fervour of his love for the degraded house of Israel, the amazing confidence of faith which could ask such great things, or his immovable assurance that God would testify of his own cause? No, we wonder most at the unspeakable grace of God, which teaches a handful of dust and ashes, as man is, thus to believe, thus to love, and thus to pray. To him be the glory!

And now, what ensues! Stupendous moment! The whole revelation of God is at stake. If no answer follow, the whole fabric falls in, and the ground of our hope is gone for ever. Then all is delusion, which Elijah has testified; all is delusion, which the prophets before him have declared, and he has confirmed; then are the pillars of God’s ancient promises as stubble, and their foundations as sand; then is the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob a fable and a dream. The prayer is uttered; there is the stillness of death in the assembly; every heart beats high; in every face is the intensity of expectation; when, lo! the answer comes; the Amen resounds! the heaven is rent; mountain and vale and sea gleam suddenly in the red blaze; the fire of the Lord breaks forth from the blue and cloudless sky; it rushes down amidst the crowd; and now it is upon the altar, and devours the burnt-offering, the wood, the stones, and the earth, and licks up the water in the trench. The people, in unspeakable consternation, fall thunderstruck to the ground, bury their faces in the dust, and cry out, “The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God!” And ye that hear it in this assembly; ye

children of God, ye servants of Baal, to the ground ! to the ground ! and forth with the cry of confession, "The Lord, he is the God ; the Lord, he is the God !" Verily I say unto you, if ye hold your peace, the very stones will cry out ! Elijah's faith is crowned ; the frenzied priesthood are put to shame, and all the gods which are not the God of the Bible are confounded and brought to nothing !

O, what has the merciful God, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, not done, to make our faith in him easy, and to bring the knowledge of himself nigh to us ! Has he ever been weary of revealing himself in nature, and in scripture, by the work of his hands, and the word of his mouth ; by arguments and figures, by poets and prophets, and by signs and wonders ; in every style, and in the easiest manner in each ; condescending to the most childish and silly of our difficulties ; and yet who acknowledges him as God ! who gives him the glory due unto his name ! O thou untoward and perverse generation of this world, come near ! come near ! Gladly would we baptize you, though reluctant, in the fire of Carmel. Gladly would we drag you, though by no welcome violence, within hearing of the great testimonies of Jehovah. We would force your eyes open to his mighty deeds, and even thrust his signs and wonders in your faces ; that you may want all excuse at the last day, that you could not have known the God of Israel. Living signs and standing wonders, like that of Carmel, have been given to thousands ; and that which he gave in these last days, when he spoke to you by his Son, is not the last. Behold the altar of his church, built upon himself as its chief corner stone, and on the twelve living stones of the apostles ! It is surrounded, too, by a trench, which the bitterest of its enemies have sought in vain to cross, with all their weapons of war, to this day. Look on it ; this sanctuary of God, in its stability, its age, its compass, where the fire of the Lord goes not out night or day. Is not this spiritual temple a standing proof that Jehovah liveth ? Look at every stone of this building ; every converted sinner ! Here, too, was a ruined altar ; but see, it is

restored. Here too was a trench around it, of thousand-fold sins, temptations, and obstacles, which closed the entrance against the Lord ; but lo ! the fire has forced its way ! Here also were stones—a hard heart and a stubborn mind ; here also were wood and earth—deadness, carnality, and darkness ; but the flame of Jehovah has devoured earth, and wood, and stone ; dried up the floods of sinful passion ; and the desolated ruin is become a monument of the glory of God. But how few believe our report ! Believe it or reject it you must ; for ye shall be surrounded with the testimonies of Israel as with a wall ; so that only two things will remain to you ;—either to cry, “The Lord, he is the God,” or as genuine children of Belial, to declare, “We desire not the knowledge of Jehovah.” It shall thus at least come to a decision with you ; and ye shall bring the counsel of God, by your own deeds, to an issue. He that returns home this day from Mount Carmel, without one echo in his heart of the words, “The Lord, he is the God,” let that man have no longer any scruple to take his place in the ranks of those whose father and prince is the devil, who has blinded the eyes of them that believe not !

The people on Mount Carmel gave glory to the God of Israel ; but the priests of Baal hardened their hearts, persisted in their rebellion, and refused all submission. They were therefore ripe for destruction. “Take the prophets of Baal,” said Elijah, “let not one of them escape.” The people lend a ready ear ; for they now perceive the foul imposture which these destroyers of their souls have practised upon them. They fall upon them, drag them down at Elijah’s command to the brook Kishon, and assist the prophet in destroying them. Their doom was just. These deceivers could no longer be permitted to abide in Israel, if idolatry was to be rooted out. They must be cut off as hardened priests of idols, as malignant teachers of error, as blood-thirsty murderers of the prophets of Jehovah. God would not only prove his existence by the manifestation of Carmel, but also shew that he was the Holy One of



Israel ; the God that judgeth in the earth. However painful this execution must have been to the merciful and compassionate heart of Elijah ; how many thousand times soever he would have preferred the conversion of these men to their destruction ; yet, because the honour of God demanded it, he could deny his natural feelings, and be obedient to God, in opposition to all human affection and impulse. I say, *obedient* ; for in the law of God, given to Moses, it is expressly enjoined, “ If any one will entice thee secretly, saying, let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou nor thy fathers, thou shalt surely kill him ; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hands of all the people.” To this express command of Jehovah, the prophet felt himself constrained to render unqualified and unhesitating submission, however great a struggle it might cost him ; for he was appointed and ordained of God to contend zealously for the law, to re-establish the rights of Jehovah in his kingdom of Israel, to restore the tables of mount Sinai from the neglect of ages to their ancient splendour. And it is not fitting that a servant of the Lord should confer first with flesh and blood. His watchword must be,—“ Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.”

The cross has introduced a new era ; and ever since the reins of empire were placed in the hands that were nailed to the tree, the iron rod has been exchanged for the gentler sceptre of long-suffering. Hence the wild grapes are suffered to remain in the true vineyard ; the wheat and the tares grow together until the harvest. But if we were still amid the times of Moses and Elijah, there would be no end of the slaughter ; and the blood of the priests of Baal would flow in streams, even in a church styled “ Evangelical,” but which is far from deserving this fair and glorious name. But their judgment slumbereth not ; and their damnation sleepeth not. Soon shall he come ; the Mighty One from Bozrah, that is red in his apparel, and shall put in motion the wine-press of his wrath ! Ye servants of Baal and seducers of the people, the sword hangs over you

only by a thread; the bow is already bent, and made ready.

Go on, go on, ye hirelings and wolves in your thousands of pulpits, and persuade your poor flocks to sacrifice to other gods than Him whom Abraham called his Lord, and the sound of whose feet was on the mountains of Israel! Go on, ye corrupters of youth; ye blind leaders of the blind, and strive amid the plaudits of the vile sons of earth to hurl the Ancient of days from his throne, that ye may set up in his stead a mockery and abomination, the phantom of your diseased brain! Go on, ye votaries of fashion, with your well-bred sneers at the Jewish God of the Bible, and defile yourselves with the idol-worship of the wisdom of the day! Hark! The angel is already flying through the midst of heaven: and his cry is Woe! Woe! The sword is already drawn that shall slay you: the cup mixed that ye shall drink of to the dregs; the pile of Tophet set in order, on which, forsaken by your gods, ye shall become flaming monuments for ever of the divine justice and holy vengeance. O, it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God; for he is a consuming fire. I beseech you, take the words home—*a consuming fire.*

But thou, Israel, take the harp; rejoice and be glad; thy God liveth! Carmel and Golgotha, heaven and earth, vie in the strain, "Thy God liveth!" Join in the song, O Israel, and call aloud, as with the voice of a trumpet, laying the one hand on thy heart, and lifting up the other on high, to confound the enemy, and to still the avenger; "My Lord, he is the God. My God is King." Amen.

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### THE PRAYER ON MOUNT CARMEL.

Prayer is the light of the soul; the hand that removes the veil from Jehovah's glory. The saint has power with God, because he walks with God, and lives in the beams of his countenance. Thus alone can the prayer of the righteous become effectual and fervent, and of much

avail. This was the secret of Elijah's wonderful success in wrestling with God. I trust each new miracle of the prophet's influence, as it has passed before us, has deepened the impression of this great truth. And, O, that the sublime display which we are about to witness of the might of prayer, may prove a still more powerful exhortation to us to maintain unbroken communion with the keeper of Israel, "and to pray without ceasing!"

1 KINGS, xviii. 41—46.

"And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain. So Ahab went up to eat and to drink: and Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees, And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times. And it came to pass, at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not. And it came to pass, in the meanwhile, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel. And the hand of the Lord was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel."

The fire has borne its testimony; now the waters speak. The grace of God exhausts itself in manifestations and testimonies that he is Lord, and not another, and that the living God rules in Israel. When shall this thunder of his power unstop the ears of the deaf adder? The prayer of Elijah is the subject of our present meditation; and we have here, I., The preparation for the prayer; II., The prayer itself; III., The answer.

I. We are now standing at the foot of Carmel, in the midst of the valley which lately witnessed the bloody execution of the priests of Baal. These men have fallen by the sword of Elijah and the repentant people, and their blood is mingled with the waters of the brook Kishon. The sword of vengeance is sheathed again with praise to Jehovah, who is holy in all his ways, and who is glorified no less in the overthrow of his enemies, than in the hallelujahs of his friends.

For three years and a half have the heavens been shut

up, and not a drop of water has refreshed the thirsty land. You can imagine the appearance of the devoted country; the whole land as a heath; man and beast reduced to skeletons; and all flesh faded like the grass. Those who had now become believers in God, must have been filled with terror, for they had learned to recognize him amid the thunder of judgment, and as seated on his throne of devouring fire! For the sake of these poor trembling sheep, the prophet was earnestly desirous that the Lord should again make his countenance to shine, so that the bones which he had broken might rejoice. As the song of faith rises most cheerfully after the storm of trial is past; as the fruit of faith ripens best in the beams of divine mercy, when the winter of wrath is over and gone, Elijah was anxious, for the people's sake, that the brazen skies should now dissolve in abundance of rain, and the season of famine and distress terminate. But for this Elijah must wrestle with God. What the rod was to Moses, by which he divided the waves of the Red Sea, and brought water out of the flinty rock, that was the prayer of faith to Elijah.

Ahab the king stood also among the people at the brook Kishon. He had been a spectator of the whole scene, from beginning to end, even of the slaughter of his priests, and that not without a certain concurrence; for he was evidently a weak, capricious tyrant, changing with the hour, and moulded by circumstances, like the potter's clay. The miracle on Carmel, and the enthusiastic cry of the people, "The Lord, he is the God," had not left his heart altogether untouched; so that even he might think for a moment, "It is possible, after all, that the Lord may be God." But he was as far from conversion as ever. Whatever faith he had, was only the transitory impulse of flesh and blood, and not the work of the Spirit of God. It is no uncommon thing, amid a great awakening in a church, and an unwonted stir among the dry bones, for many to be carried along with the crowd—they cannot themselves tell how, or why. It is as in a thunder-storm, when one is struck down by the lightning, and his comrades fall like-

wise to the ground from the violent shock and concussion of the air. He has been smitten, and remains on the spot ; they are unharmed, and soon rise up and pursue their way as if nothing had happened. Thus was it with Ahab, and with many others, at the fiery testimony on Carmel.

Elijah, about to retire to prayer, could well dispense with the company of Ahab and his train. "Get thee up," said he to him, "eat and drink, for there is the sound of abundance of rain." With these words, in which we cannot fail to perceive a scornful and stinging reproof of the sensuality of the wretched monarch, Elijah sought to relieve himself of his unwelcome society, that he might give himself, undisturbed, to communion with his God. The children of this world must often submit to such painful exclusion from the sanctuary. It is one of the judgments which pass on them even in time. Such a judgment it is, when it is in effect said to any of us by our pious friends, "Retire for a little ; I wish to converse with my God," or, "Withdraw to thine own circle ; I expect the company of brethren in the faith ; and our intercourse can have no interest for thee." Is it not a touching reproof to us, if the children of God become all at once mute and monosyllabic on our entering their company ; or, if out of complaisance to us, they change at once the conversation to the weather, the politics, or the news of the day ? Is it not as a divine admonition to us, when we cannot help seeing that our presence is no better than an intrusion, and when it is perhaps gently hinted to us that we may possibly have missed our way a little, and made a slight mistake in entering a society where we are not altogether at home ? Yes, to be thus excluded from the sanctuary, and banished from the temple of God, is surely a foretaste of the last great separation ! And how many of you must swallow this bitter pill day after day, in being told, now on one occasion, and now on another, "Get ye up, eat and drink ; we should like to be alone ; here we cannot well employ you ; and we should be sorry to cast pearls before swine !"

“Get thee up,” said Elijah, and added, “for there is the sound of abundance of rain.” The prophet heard the sound of motion and a rustling in the air, as is common before a storm, in the tops of trees, and on the waters. Whether he heard it only in faith in the ear of the mind; or whether God made his organs of hearing so acute, that he perceived what was afar off, or in the higher regions of the air, we cannot tell. It is enough that he heard it; and it sounded to him like the tolling of the bell of prayer; as a fore-running Amen to the earnest supplication to which he was addressing himself; and it strengthened him in the hope that his will in desiring rain was one with the will of God, who would now send rain.

My brethren, we sometimes hear such a sound also; and as often as we hear it, let it be to us what it was to Elijah, a solemn call to prayer. This is what God intends it to be to us. When at any time the preaching of truth is blessed to a people, and the word comes home to the soul; when there is a movement in a congregation, and a general excitement is produced; when the tears of emotion flow, and people meet together and say, “What a solemn and impressive sermon!” there is then the sound of rain; and then it is time, ye children of God, to lift up your hands and plead that after the sound abundance of rain may come! Again, when the judgment of God visits our neighbourhood, and some barren fig-tree is suddenly cut down before our eyes, or some scoffer is visibly smitten in his sins; when the whole neighbourhood is alarmed, and unbelievers themselves are obliged to confess, “This is the finger of God,” then there is the sound of rain; and you must pray, ye flock of God, that it stop not there! When thou art informed, Christian brother, that here one man is desiring the sincere milk of the gospel, and that there another has risen up from the seat of the scornful, and is seeking to draw near to the children of God; when thou observest that in thy household a spirit of inquiry after eternal things is awakened, and that thy children begin to hear gladly of the Lord Jesus,

then the sound is come to thine ears ; then it is time to give thyself to prayer ! Yes ! be watchful, ye children of God ; never fall asleep on the walls of Zion. Keep your ears attentive, and hearken, here and yonder, and in the church, and in your houses, among your friends and relatives, and when ye hear the first rustle, be it only faint and from afar, go directly to your closets, fall upon your knees, and stretching out your hands before the Lord, cry, " O Lord, there is the sound ; we will not let thee go till thou grant us also the abundance of rain ! " And take the same course, when there begins to be a rustling, not without you in others, but within you in your own selves ; when it thunders and lightens amid your own darkness ; when a word strikes you, and a ray of light falls upon your souls ; when Christ reveals himself before your eyes, and a foretaste of his grace is vouchsafed to your hearts ; then give the more diligence, to make your calling and election sure. The rustling is not the rain itself ; but it is a fore-runner of rain, and a divine summons to prayer. O, that you would so regard it !

Elijah delayed, you see, not a moment, after he heard the sound of rain. He dismissed Ahab and his attendants, and we are told " Ahab went up to eat and to drink. " Miserable man ! After all the great and heart-affecting scenes of the day, he just felt as if he had witnessed an interesting though somewhat tedious comedy, after which refreshment is welcome, and food is relished. But where are such souls not to be found ? Many among you are not one whit better than Ahab. Ah ! woe is you, ye careless souls, that can suffer the most convincing testimonies, the strongest calls to repentance, and the most impressive miracles of God, to pass as a shadow on the wall before your eyes ; pleased perhaps a little, as with a gay show, but bringing nothing more away with you from our churches and meetings, than perhaps a complaint of the length of the services, or matter for conversational display and conceited criticism, together with a good appetite for the next carnal meal, and an exhilarating prospect of the worldly

pleasure and indulgences of the Sabbath evening. Yes ! this is all ; and perhaps in the morning the Lord and his Spirit has made answer before your eyes and ears, as with fire ! Well, we will not detain you here, “Get ye hence, and eat and drink.”

II. When Ahab was gone, Elijah, we are told, went up to the top of Carmel ; bent in spirit, as we shall see, he descended into the depths of humiliation. On Carmel's summit all was calm and still, as in the lonely chamber ; there no unbidden guests followed ; there he could collect his soul to prayer. On Carmel's summit, also, the prophet could most readily perceive and descry whether his prayer was likely to be answered, as he stood on a watch-tower, whence land and sea were visible, and a wide horizon lay around him. Of this commanding view, however, he appears to have made little use ; for no sooner does he reach the summit than he stoops to the ground, kneels, closes his eyes, bends his head forwards towards his knees, and in this posture begins to plead with the Lord for rain. Behold him ! Who would say that this is the same man, who but lately stood forth on Carmel, as God's vicegerent, seemingly empowered with a command over the elements ? His whole demeanour expresses nothing but prostration of spirit ; nothing but self-annihilation ; nothing but consciousness of his own insignificance, poverty, unworthiness, and impotence. But it was the will of God that we should see his prophet, once for all, in such a posture ; and overhear him, as it were, in his closet, that we might learn where his marvellous strength really lay ; and see that it has been God's rule from the beginning to work only with broken instruments, and to do wonders with bruised reeds ; and he instructed not only whence, but how, Elijah derived his greatness ; and never be led more to put the crown of honour on the head of man, instead of laying it at the feet of Him, whose right it is ; and feel the comfort of the appeal of the apostle James, “Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are.” When Elijah stood



before the people, he was the ambassador of God, and had to sustain his high character in word and action ; but, when he stood before God, he was a poor helpless sinner, who was only able to live by grace, and had nothing to demand, but everything to beg, from the hand of grace. On the summit of Carmel, the feeling of his unworthiness seems in an altogether peculiar manner to have overwhelmed him. And how could it be otherwise, when he looked back on the events of that day, and upon the whole course of his life, to that moment ? How had success everywhere attended him, and all that he desired been given into his bosom ! What succour, what preservation, what answers to prayer had he experienced ! And who was *he* ? *We* cannot, *we* dare not, utter it ; but *he* himself, he as well as Paul, will have it confessed before God, that he is the chief of sinners ! And in this consciousness, he appears before the Lord, to implore a new miracle, though the altar yet smokes with the fiery testimony, which had shone forth from the Lord at his request.

When Elijah had thus, in the depths of self-annihilation, wrestled for a time with God, in a way which but few know from their own experience, for all believers are not led by a path of such total and absolute abasement ; he sent his young servant (who was perhaps the son of the widow of Zarephath, whom, after his raising from the dead, he might have taken with him as a scholar), and said to him, "Go up now, and look towards the sea." He placed the servant upon the watchtower, that he might attend to the sky, and inform him when his prayer was heard, and a prognostic of coming rain was visible in the distant horizon. That his prayer would be heard he had no doubt, from the faithful word of Him who had said to him at Zarephath, "Go, shew thyself to Ahab ; and I will send rain upon the earth." The servant went, looked into the distance, and cast his eyes about on all sides ; but the heaven was clear as crystal ; not a cloud was to be seen. He returned, and said, "I see nothing." It is a matter of every-day Christian experience, that help does

not come at the first cry, and that the harvest of prayer is not reaped as soon as it is sown. Much need not be said to justify this procedure of Divine wisdom. It is painful to flesh and blood, but in the end most salutary for us. What would the consequence be, if all the treasure chambers of God's grace were opened to us on our first knocking? Should we not, then, come to think ourselves rulers and commanders in the city of God, and quite forget our nothingness and poverty! Should we not be in danger of making idols of our prayers, as the Israelites of the brazen serpent, and feel as if prayer saved us of itself, as if we possessed in it a secret talisman, a divining rod, or a legal claim upon the bounty of God! We would soon become so full of our own sufficiency, that the grace of God would be received by us in vain. Hence our gracious Father is not always ready with his answer the moment after our prayer; but lets us generally stand a while at the door, so that once and again it may be said, "I see nothing." Thus we are brought to reflect a little, and restored to our sense of the truth, that we have really no claim at all to present, and that if aught be granted us, it is of pure grace. If we begin with asking loaves, we are allowed to wait till we descend to slices, and at last to crumbs. If we come before him at first as righteous persons, he keeps us back, till we are become in our own eyes poor sinners, unworthy petitioners, nay, dogs; and are ready to say, "Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table." Such is his method.

"I see nothing," said the prophet's servant. But the praying Elijah did not despair. That we weary so soon in our prayers, and desist so soon altogether, proceeds, in general, from this cause, that we are not sufficiently earnest in our desire of the blessing. He that sees hell open before him, I assure you, will not easily cease to cry for mercy, and he that feels the blight of the curse on his soul, will not easily give up praying that his conscience may be sprinkled by the blood of the Lamb. So it was with Elijah. "Go again" said he to his servant, "seven times." Why he chose the

number seven and no other, we cannot exactly tell. It is one of those mysteries of Hebrew type and figure which we should not interpret rashly. But you may ask, Why did the prophet require his servant to come to him with so many discouraging reports. What could it avail to hear always over again the reply, "I see nothing?" Doubtless it was to stimulate the prophet's ardour, to excite him to a yet more earnest wrestling with God, to make him less and less in his own eyes, and to draw forth deeper and deeper sighs from his contrite soul. How must his fervour have increased from moment to moment; till heaven was moved, and the heart of the merciful God yearned over the agony of his servant. No doubt, immediate hearing of prayer is more agreeable, but delay so improved as in this case, is unspeakably more profitable. Those are the most blessed spots on earth which are hallowed by the frequent kneeling, and watered with the bursting tears of suppliants who will not let the Lord go till he bless them. In this course of long sighing and crying the body of sin and death receives its most deadly wounds; the fallow ground of the heart is most thoroughly broken up and prepared for the seed of the word; the remains of self-righteousness are most thoroughly demolished, till not a stone is left upon another, and its foundations of sand too are utterly swept away; and in the deepest basis of conviction in the real centre of the soul, the corner stone of the true temple of grace is laid; and if deliverance then follow, how great is the joy, how permanent and inwrought the confidence! Blessed are ye, and truly enviable, ye souls that have thus experienced in your hearts the deep working of the great Master-Builder; who have struggled through such depths of abasement to the sure footing of a patient trust in Christ; and who, after all the drought and lingering of the wilderness, are now refreshed by the fountains and the palms of Elim!

III. The servant comes the seventh time, and says, "Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand." Blessed message! Elijah's prayer is answered

At first only a little cloud appears, scarcely visible. But if God gives anything he gives all, for he does not work by halves. Art thou receiving a little grace? Rejoice, for in this thou hast a pledge that thou shalt receive "grace for grace." Hast thou obtained aught of his Spirit? then rest assured that thou shalt be filled with all his influences. The forgiveness of one sin draws after it the forgiveness of all; and the "day of small things" in the work of regeneration shall lead to complete renewal in the "day of Christ." God either gives all or nothing. He either does not begin the good work, or he carries it to perfection. Such is his method. Rejoice, then, though no more than a little cloud of grace has as yet risen in the horizon of thy soul! The time is at hand when this little cloud shall cover the whole sky.

No sooner does Elijah hear of the arising of the cloud, than he brings his prayer to a close. God had closed it with a mighty Amen! He rises from the earth, and says to his servant, "Go up, say unto Ahab, prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not." Thus was literally fulfilled, what Elijah had said, "There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." And on this account also it was that the Lord did not send the abundance of rain at once; but made the little cloud arise, that Elijah might have time to announce to the king the approaching change, and that it might be apparent that this took place at Elijah's word, and that his Lord was God, and the Ruler of Providence.

The servant of Elijah reaches the royal pavilion, while the sky was yet clear, and nothing seemed less likely than the promise of rain. "Prepare thy chariot," cries he, "get thee down, that the rain stop thee not." "Rain!" would the astonished guests exclaim. "Rain!" would the people cry, full of joyful hope; and no sooner had they cast their eyes upwards, than from every region of the sky the words seemed to come to them, "Yea, and Amen, abundance of rain!" Dark thunder clouds ascend out of the sea, one after another, the heavens become black as sackcloth, the

wind sighs over the sea, and moans in the forest, and a torrent of rain pours down upon the earth. O welcome streams, refreshing floods! The face of the earth is renewed, and joy spreads through all nature. The breath of life rises from the fields; wood and meadow are again clothed in green; the birds take up their songs anew in the thick branches, and man, and beast, and every thing rejoices as in a second birth. The melody of joy and health is in the tabernacles and hearts of the righteous. Ahab is already seated in his chariot, and on his way to his royal seat in Jezreel. But the hand of the Lord comes upon Elijah, and girds up his loins, strengthens him, and repairs his exhausted force, so that he outstrips the royal chariot. He required to be thus kept before the king, as a living memorial of all the great things which God had done by his prophet to the house of Israel; that Ahab might not forget them, but carry the fresh impression of them home to Jezebel. Elijah therefore outran the chariot, and kept before his eyes, through all the violence of rain and tempest, till he came to the entrance of Jezreel.

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“And Elijah,” saith the apostle James, as it were in the midst of our assembly, “was a man like as we are, and he prayed earnestly, that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again! and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.” And why does the apostle notice this? He wishes to impress on us, that we shall not fail, any more than Elijah did, “if we only pray in faith; because the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous man availeth much.” Who can number the wonders of God’s power and goodness, which have been wrought in the earth, at the call of prayer! By prayer, Moses turned the fierce wrath of the Almighty away from Israel; and with outstretched arms beat down the host of Amalek. Manoa, by the constraint of prayer, drew down the Angel of the Covenant in a visible form. By prayer, Samuel, in his

chamber, routed the army of the Philistines, and caused the terror of thunder to roll over Israel's foes. By the sword of prayer, Jehoahaz, though a wicked man, repelled the force of the Syrians, that defied all other weapons of defence. Through prayer, King Josiah died in peace. Through prayer, fifteen years were added to Hezekiah's life; the three men were preserved in the fiery furnace; and to Daniel it was said by Gabriel, "I am come because of thy words." At the prayer of the disciples, the heaven was opened on the day of Pentecost, and the place where they were assembled was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. Prayer broke the fetters in which Peter lay, and burst the doors of his prison. Prayer rebuked storms, made the sick whole, and brought the dead back to life. And what shall I say more of the power, the wonders, and the miracles of prayer? The whole Scripture is full of them, and our church too would be full of them, and all Christendom would be full of them, were there more prayer in Israel, and more smoke of incense on the altars of Judah. But prayer sleeps amongst us; for our praying at meals, and at morning and evening, according to custom—this sleepy, dull, and heartless utterance by rote of the words of devotion—deserves not the name of prayer. Keep these formal compliments to yourselves; the Lord does not want such service. The sighs of the broken and contrite heart, the cry of the humble and needy, who lie in the dust and are "in the depths," the groans of conflict with the body of sin and death, the language of dependence, confession, thanksgiving, and earnest zeal: these, and these alone, constitute true prayer.

Brethren, pray for earnestness, pray for the spirit of grace and supplication, and ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you. He "that cannot lie" has promised it. We, too, have a Mount Carmel, on which to pray for what we will, "and it shall be done unto us." This is the ground of thy Redeemer's merits; and when thou standest there, the heart of God will yearn over thee; and his hand will deny thee nothing that is for thy good. Take hold only of

his eternal faithfulness in Christ, and rest on the footing of his immutable promises ; and then thou art in the true place of prayer ; then thou art in the attitude which secures an answer. You may have to sigh, and implore, and weep, but the watchman on the height shall at last bring a message of joy. Though he comes six times with the answer, “ I see nothing,” let him six times return, “ while you pray as in an agony ;” at the seventh time it will be said, “ Behold there is a cloud, and it will rain.” Often we cannot ourselves see the answer to our prayers. But could we, like Elijah, place a watchman at the sick-bed of those sufferers for whom we implore consolation ; or amid those dear friends at a distance, for whom we seek grace and protection ; or by the cradles of our children, for whom we desire the guidance and the guardianship of angels ; how often would we learn with joyful astonishment, that at the very moment when we bent the knee on their behalf, the commandment had gone forth to help them. O, let the voice of prayer rise then with new frequency and ardour in the midst of us, that it may be made manifest to the glory of God, and the shame of the adversary, that we are encamped under the banner of the living God, the God that heareth prayer. Pray in faith, and pray in humility ; pray for yourselves, and pray for all ; and pray in hope, for there stands written, as on the rock of eternity, the great and immutable word, that must outlast heaven and earth, “ Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.” Amen

## I.—THE FLIGHT INTO THE WILDERNESS.

“HE that cometh from heaven is above all.” Such was the testimony of the Herald in the wilderness, to him whose shoe’s latchet he did not count himself worthy to unloose. The whole appearance of the Son of Man upon earth serves to confirm this testimony. It is the self-revelation of one who is “above all;” and wherever we behold our Saviour appear and act on the stage of gospel history, the conviction irresistibly forces itself on an unprejudiced mind, that here is one indeed greater than Moses and all the prophets and apostles, that here is one “separate from sinners” and above all creatures, one who has descended but for a short space upon earth, as upon strange ground, while his proper seat is above the clouds, and on the throne of majesty and glory.

In all his actions, we feel that a mere man could never have so acted, however wonderfully he might have been endowed with heavenly powers. No doubt many prophets and apostles performed miracles as great as his; but if we look at the style and manner in which they performed them, his miracles rise above theirs as high as the heaven is above the earth. Let us view them in the moment when they are exerting all their miraculous power, and we see at once that they are not in their own element, but are liker persons who have been led on ground where all is strange and untried. We find them, for the most part, in great excitement, anxiety, and confusion. They divide seas with trembling hands; the dead that come forth at their call inspire them with the same astonishment as the surrounding multitudes, and the anxious measures and preparations which generally precede their miracles, shew them to be but feeble mortals, who are in themselves less than nothing, and who are only invested for a moment with a power not their own, under whose gigantic weight



they are well nigh overwhelmed. The power is not bound up in the essence of their nature, nor is it even lent them for the moment, they are but the frail instruments of an invisible miracle-worker.

How different is the impression which the miracles of Jesus force upon us ! When he comes forth amid the tumult of the elements to rebuke them, or draws near the graves to reanimate the dust, how distinctly do we feel at once that "He is above all." These efforts of Omnipotence seem his familiar work ; this divine power of creation is seen to be inherent in his nature. Here we find no lengthened preparations, no anxious and awe-struck employment of means ; here we have nothing of that inward struggle which Moses felt as he stood by the Red Sea, nothing of that convulsive earnestness, with which Elijah raised the widow's son, at Zarephath. He proceeds to the great work with a divine repose, as one who ruleth over all, and whom nature is accustomed to obey. He bears no staff in his hands as a badge of dependence : in tranquil majesty he stretches forth his hand ; and the blind see, the palsied arise and walk. He needs not, like prophets and apostles, to command in the name of another, or appeal to a power above his own ! His language is "I will ; be thou clean," and the leper is cleansed. He beckons, and the winds and waves obey ; He commands, "Young man, arise !" and life starts up from the midst of corruption. Thus a majesty shines everywhere around him, which reveals to us nothing less than "all the fulness of the Godhead" in him. Nay, He must, so to speak, check the thunder of his power and hide the fulness of divinity that dwells in him ; and so when we find him at other times veiling his glory, and standing before us in the sinless weakness of humanity, we feel at once that this is but an assumed nature, and not the original ; while, on the contrary, the lustre of supernatural power that rests on prophets and apostles is but a reflected splendour, and the frailty and weakness all their own.

And not only does he differ immeasurably from all in

his working of miracles ; his whole life is beyond all parallel. Who ever spake like him, whose very prayers were expressions of his will ? Who ever reproved like him, in whose Woe ! Woe ! the trump of judgment seems already to sound ? Who ever consoled like him, who not only prayed for a home in heaven to his people, but bought it with his blood, and went before to prepare its mansions ? Thus he appears before us everywhere as the Holy One of God, distinct from all creatures ; higher than the heavens, entitled to all homage, worthy of unlimited trust ; since every display of his nature is but a raying forth of the glory, majesty, and greatness that fills heaven and earth, and in the blaze of which we should perish, if it were not a glory “ full of grace and truth.”

Yes, “ He is above all.” And the history of perhaps the most glorious of all prophets, the prophet Elijah, will, as it proceeds, more and more display and confirm the great truth.

#### 1 KINGS xix. 1—4.

“ And Aha told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal, how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow about this time. And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper-tree : and he requested for himself that he might die ; and said, It is enough : now, O Lord, take away my life ; for I am not better than my fathers.”

The history here takes a turn. The man of God is called away from his public work of reformation, and his path loses itself once more in the silence and desolation of the wilderness. This is a fresh trial and spiritual exercise for the prophet. The torch is shaken that it may blaze more brightly ; the reformer of Israel must now descend himself into the furnace of purification. Our attention is here called, I. To Elijah's persecution ; II. His Flight ; III. His dejection.

I. We have now left the height of Carmel, and are ap-

proaching the palace of Ahab, in the rich plain of Jezreel, where the monarch, charmed with the beauty of the place, had fixed his summer residence. The queen stands at the window of the palace, and awaits, with impatience, the return of her consort. He comes at full speed amid the violence of rain; hastily alights and hurries at once into the apartments of his haughty consort, to be the first messenger of the astonishing events which he had just witnessed. Elijah meanwhile remains in the neighbourhood, awaiting the impression of the stupendous miracle. The most joyful hopes may have filled his mind; and can we pronounce him too sanguine, if he promised himself the complete and immediate return of the court, as well as of the nation, to the faith of their fathers?

Ahab, full of the emotions which the wonders of the day had produced, begins his recital in high excitement, "The Tishbite has conquered. Fire from heaven has confirmed his mission. With these eyes, I have seen, at his prayer, flames descend from the clouds, consume the burnt-offering, wood, stones, and earth, and lick up the water in the trench. All the people can bear witness to it. They fell on their faces and confessed, as with one voice, that Jehovah is God. The priests of Baal are slain. They have fallen by the sword of the prophet; and their blood flows with the brook to the sea. The people have applauded the deed. They were laughed at as liars and impotent deceivers. Their authority and their worship is for ever destroyed. The enthusiasm for Elijah is universal. He is a prophet of the living God. The miracle on Carmel has placed it beyond doubt; and this deluge of rain now universally confirms it. It pours down at his command. He it was that shut up heaven; and he has now opened it again."

Thus probably the king proceeded. Suddenly he breaks off in the midst of his narrative, recoils in confusion, and stands thunderstruck. Alas! his recital has failed of all good impression. A storm gathers on the brows of his imperious queen. Scorn, wrath, and revenge chase each

other, like ominous clouds, over her countenance. Her eyes gleam with rage, and a volcano of passion struggles in her breast. The king observes the change; and his confusion is indescribable. His countenance falls; his confidence in himself is gone; and his whole temper is changed as by a stroke of enchantment. And now the wonders of Carmel have lost their hold of him, the Tishbite appears a mere magician, his miracles works of infernal art, and his slaughter of the priests a bloody crime that must be deeply avenged. So evidently thinks Jezebel, the ruling queen! the adored mistress of his affections! And thou, poor captive slave! How durst thou once think otherwise?

King Ahab presents us with a melancholy instance of one, who, though not quite hardened against all impression of truth, is nevertheless detained in miserable bondage to the father of lies, a bondage not the less fatal that its fetters are those of love and affection. His heart was given to Jezebel, and for her favour all must be sacrificed, as the happiness of his life was entirely in her hands. Hence he was the sport of her caprice; and the very inmost convictions of his soul yielded to one haughty glance of her eye. Pliant like clay in the hands of the potter, and capable of taking any form, he was always ready to be just what this heathen mistress pleased to make him. Sold by love under her influence, he had given up the last remnant of manly independence, and before he was aware of it, his individual being was so sunk in that of the proud tyranness, that he heard only with her ears, saw with her eyes, and thought and felt only with her.

There are a multitude of persons still, who are thus led blindfold by human influence. The chains with which the prince of darkness binds men to his yoke and banner are not always the coarser ones of vice and degrading lust. He makes sure of thousands as his prey, by binding them with the cords of some tender affection to others who have espoused his side and zealously declared themselves the enemies of God and of the cross of Christ. Whether this silken cord be filial or parental affection, or ardent

friendship, or virtuous love, the unhappy soul becomes unawares a slave of man, a bondsman in spirit. The beloved object rules with resistless influence, fashions the other after the mould of its own thought and feeling; and thus insensibly, and without effort, holds him in leading-strings, which are the more dangerous the more secretly and gently they are managed; and ere the poor self-sold thrall is aware, the spirit of independence is quite extinct; and should he ever make the attempt once more to stand on his own footing, and to choose his own path, a fascinating glance, or a look of disapproval, or an air of coldness, is quite enough to wither the holiest resolves of duty in the bud, to make the heart waver in its best principles, and to level the firmest convictions to the ground. And as love is here the tempter to this foul slavery, so there are others who sink in an equally deplorable bondage, through an impious homage to the energy and mere power of mind. These are persons of weak character, who need only to fall in with a man of some talent or genius, who has the firmness and decision which they want, and straightway are seen to become passive instruments in his hands, obedient to every impulse or capricious movement of his will. To the false influence of his accomplishments they can make no resistance, they believe that they shall catch his excellences which they admire, by a servile subjection to all the features of his mind, good or bad, as the laws of their own; and thus daily changing with the fluctuations of their models, they are never more than what the last man of genius or strong will they met with has made them, perhaps, on his part, by mere accident.

Ye weak and pliant souls, would that you but felt one influence more, even of him, who says, "Ye are bought with a price, be not ye the servants of men;" or of him, the Herald in the wilderness, who, taking in the whole circle of strong minds and gifted imaginations, from one end of heaven to the other, testified, "He that cometh from heaven is above all;" a testimony which He himself repeats with great plainness and conscious dignity in these

words, "I am the light of the world, I am the way, the truth and the life. No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man, who is in heaven."

And ye too that rule the souls of others, be it by blood, or affection, or talent, or any other influence, see to it, that ye are not apostles of Satan and emissaries of the pit. The blood of every soul that dies through your influence, whether you purpose it or not, will be required at your hand. Have you made a covenant with lies and chosen for yourselves the chamber of death? Be it so. Only make a sign on your doors, that the simple may pass by and escape the plague within; cry out like the leper, "Unclean! Unclean!" a long way before you; and seek where ye have kindled the flame of attachment and devotion, to quench it again, with all speed, ere it burn like fire of hell, and swallow up its victim in eternal ruin! For whosoever destroys a single soul, "him will God destroy."

And woe to you, ye men of proud genius, among a people, who, with flagrant ingratitude, pervert the gifts and powers which God has given you into weapons of darkness, and wage impious war under the banner of the father of lies against the cause, the temple and the altars of the Most High! Woe to you, as ye sit on your thrones of fame, and lend yourselves, as if ye were the gods of the earth, to the homage of admiring crowds, and use your superiority over your worshippers only to wreath the serpent coils of infidelity more firmly about your deluded generation, and to mix for them the poisoned cup of the world's enchantments, with which they reel and stagger into the dark abyss, where they will awake from the dizzy madness, only to curse you and themselves for ever! Ye applauded demi-gods on the heights of art and science, who, with dark pride, would extinguish the world's sun that it might warm itself at the sparks of your kindling, and walk in the light of your meteor fancies, and antichristian systems! Ye laurelled heads, that trick out the brood of sin in meretricious dress, and defying all restraint of

holy feeling, spread the horrid delusion in the minds of the simple, that sin is no sin, if it be but done with grace ! Ye leaders and oracles of the world, who had the call to be the prophets and teachers of your age, and have been the bane of your century, the deceivers of unstable souls, and the leaders of rebellion against the Lord and his anointed ! Woe to you, one and all, ye betrayers of humanity ; your reign will soon be over, your day is drawing nigh ! A time is approaching when, from the lips which now weary you with their shouts of praise, the dreadful thunder of wild execrations shall sound in your ears, and the very hands which now crown you with laurels shall be lifted to heaven against you, and draw down upon you the lightning of an eternal curse. Be not deceived ! The history of the world is not the day of judgment. The last decision is in the hand of Him, whose eyes are as a flame of fire, and who applies another balance than the folly of the world, which worships the mere outward show. Your glory has its season like the flower of the grass. “ All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth and the flower falleth away.” 1 Peter, i. 24.

The spark is cast into the mine, and the explosion is dreadful. Jezebel storms with rage, and her countenance is fired with the passion of a demon. The fire of Carmel has burnt, as it were, into her soul. She is filled with the thirst of blood. She would rather that the whole nation had died of famine, than that a triumph should be conceded to the prophet and his God. A horrid character, you will think. But is Jezebel buried for ever in the dust of Samaria ? Would that it were not too true that the spirit of this age, at least of thousands of its children, is the spirit of Jezebel. Where one cannot hear of the works of God and the triumphs of the gospel without malice and scorn ; where news of conversions and outpourings of the spirit are intolerable ; where a base joy fills the mind at accounts of the progress of antichrist, and of the failure of religious schemes ; where a satanic cry of exultation is raised over some saint who has made a fall, or some weak

brother who has run unto foolish errors; wherever, in a word, one can rejoice at what makes angels grieve, and mourn at what is the cause of their joy, there is the spirit of Jezebel! How many regard this spirit as that of truth. How many of our public journals are inspired by it! How many of our polished circles and assemblies acknowledge its sway! It tunes the harp of many of our poets, and lies at the bottom of the wisdom of many of our philosophers. Has it not even raised itself to the chairs of some of our theologians, and spread its folly and its mischief from the pulpits of very many of our ministers? Nay, where is the rank in life, into which this hateful spirit has not insinuated itself? It meets us in every guise, and among all classes. But woe unto this spirit from the judgment of the Lord! "Behold, I will cast that woman Jezebel into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, and I will kill her children with death."—Rev. ii. 22. Such is their end.

Elijah then must die, Jezebel has sworn it by her gods. But the Lord interposes. He can bind the unicorn with his band, and put a hook into the jaws of the leviathan; and the result is a most surprising one. Jezebel, who, in subtlety of intrigue, was at other times without a rival, is hurried away by the blindness of her passions, and led, before fulfilling her murderous intention, to apprise the prophet of his danger. This was truly an imprudent measure. But who can be prudent when the Lord "infatuates their counsel?" and blessed be his name that he can turn the plans of the wicked into foolishness! Jezebel then "sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, so let the gods do unto me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow at this time." Elijah hears the message, and is utterly confounded. Is this the last result of all his hopes, and all his struggles! the only fruit of the lengthened famine! of the unparalled miracles and divine testimonies of Carmel! Jezebel more hardened than before; feeble Ahab again gained over; the reformation of Israel threatened with formidable resistance, which



might perhaps frustrate it for ever ; and he himself in greater danger than ever before ! O, it was a bitter draught for the soul of the man of God ! His fairest hopes are scattered, a storm of hail has ravaged the field that seemed white unto harvest, and who shall comfort him ? Never had the prophet received a more painful stroke ; and if his faith steers clear of such rocks without shipwreck, it must plainly be by the guidance of an Almighty Hand.

Now, do you ask, in peplexity, Is the Lord a God who takes pleasure in casting down the hopes of his people, which He himself has inspired ? No, my friends, it is not so. All the hopes that he has inspired he realizes, only we must not be his counsellors to prescribe to him the manner in which the fulfilment is to take place. Is the Lord a God, asks another, who leaves his servants whom he has called to waste their powers in vain ? No, but a God who would fain have all his servants convinced that the conversion and enlightenment of the sinful soul is not of him that runneth, or of him that willeth, but of God that sheweth mercy. Is the Almighty then a God who can begin a great and good work and leave it unfinished ? Far be it from Him. All his works are perfected in wisdom, but they are "wonderful." By suffering obstacles and delays to arise, he only illustrates his own wisdom and power in the end, and forces from the creature the confession, "This is the finger of God." Is the Lord then a God who can suffer a work to miscarry which we have begun with a view to his honour ? O, no ! but he loves so to bring about the result, that we must altogether retire into the shade, and give up all claim to a share, for ourselves or others, in what is his work alone. Such, my friends, are the ways of God. Be perplexed no longer then by this cross in the way of Elijah. God will remove it in his own time. His career is not yet ended ; spare your judgment to the close, and remember the fine remark of an enlightened father of the church, "The beauty of things appears at the moment of their ripeness, which God waits for. He that should taste the blossom of the cherry for

the fruit, would pass a poor judgment on it ; he that should conceive of the foliage of the woods from the cheerlessness of winter, would judge very blindly." But often no better is our judgment of the government of God, and the designs of his Providence !

II. How then does Elijah act in his perilous circumstances ? " When he saw this," says the history, " he arose and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah." In this instance, Elijah's faith appears in some measure to have failed him. " When he saw *this*," says the narrative, and thereby seems to give a significant hint respecting the state of his mind at this period. Now, *what* did he see ? Not God's promises, aid, power, and faithfulness ; these only glimmered on him, from the distant back-ground, with faint broken rays. The fore-ground was filled with other images : the danger of the enraged Jezebel, and the horrors of a bloody death. This was what he saw, and his faith did not rise with the emergency. Instead of soaring as before, on eagles' wings, and looking down on these dangers with sublime composure from the high tower of the divine promises, he was overcome with human fear ; and instead of an invincible resistance in the armour of his God, we see him, for once, retiring from his post.

" He arose and went *for his life*," or, as others render it, " He arose and went *whither he could*." This indicated the obscurity of his course and the uncertainty of his steps. He had this time no divine direction as to whither he should flee. Hitherto all his ways had been ordered most distinctly of the Lord ; but not so now. No express direction of God served as the staff of his pilgrimage, as a guide to his feet, and " a lamp unto his path." He went out into the wide world in uncertainty, harassed by many doubts, and attended by no consoling assurances, that he was taking this road for God ; since he went it only for himself, and the sake of his own life ; and verily this thought was not at all calculated to give relief to his troubled mind.

How easy and cheerful is it to walk in these paths, however rough and thorny they be, in which we know for certain that we have the warrant of God. How joyfully is everything undertaken, begun, and ended, which wears to us the sure authority of a divine commission. We then run and are not weary ; we walk and are not faint. But to have put to sea without knowing if we had not better have remained where we were ; to have entered on a path without a single word from God, whether it is his path or not, and not one into which he suffers us to rush in his anger, alas ! how painful is the situation ! How lame are our feet in such a way, how unsteady all our steps ! How do the knees totter, the spirits flag, and the spring and vigour of the soul give way ! Such appears to have been the situation of the prophet, as in confusion, disappointment, and fear, he left Jezreel, and quitted the post of duty without any distinct intimation from God. The quite unaccountable imprudence of the queen, indeed, in betraying her murderous purpose to him, might perhaps, in some measure, have warranted him to conclude that the Lord was warning him to flee for his life. This was, however, no more than an uncertain human inference, and no undoubted divine declaration. It was but a broken reed, on which he could not lean with safety.

But though the Lord may sometimes allow us, like Elijah, to go whither we will, and may, in the meanwhile, maintain an entire silence, this is no other than the result of his wise and tender love. The wholesome fruit we reap, from this experience, is a deep inward conviction what a blessed thing it is to be entirely devoted to the Lord's service, to walk always in the light of his guidance, and, like Israel, to pitch and to remove our tents, and journey onward at his word. The more one learns to value this blessed state by experience of the opposite, the more confidently will his heart rest on God, the easier will the somewhat hard petition be, "Not my will, but thine be done ;" and the more earnestly will he hearken to the first whisper of the Divine voice, and seek beforehand the counsel and

will of God in everything. But even when the saints of God, go whither they will, in doubt and in darkness, the faithful God still follows them, and keeps at their side, though he may keep himself long concealed. He can never forsake them, but leads them, by a secret guidance, it may be, but always to a happy end. And this Elijah now experienced. Little as the prophet knew of it, the Lord was with him by the way. Let us only have patience, and, before we are aware, the clouds will vanish and we shall see, that, after all, Elijah did not go whither he would, but that now, as formerly, he was walking in the secret way of the Lord.

After the prophet had travelled for many days, and wandered through a great part of Samaria, and the whole land of Judea, he came at last to Beersheba, as it were by chance, for he had as little to do there as anywhere else. He first alighted on it without plan or purpose ; his heart weary, his head oppressed with sad thoughts. Here, however, he could not remain. The wells which the father of the faithful had digged here, yielded him no refreshment ; the trees which he had planted, no reviving shade ; and the altar of Abraham was probably overturned, as his prayer had long ceased among his degenerate children. The prophet was too afflicted in spirit for common society, and even the company of his faithful attendant was unwelcome. What could he do for him ? could he enlighten the darkness that crowded over his soul, or answer the mysterious question which disturbed his peace ? He left him therefore at Beersheba, and then went forth all alone into the silent and solitary wilderness, far into its depths, a whole day's journey, until the sun went down. He then threw himself upon the heath, under a juniper, and sank under the load of his own gloomy thoughts.

III. Thick darkness hung over the prophet's soul ; this is seen in his whole conduct. His shut up heart, his longing for solitude, his planless wanderings into the gloomy wilderness, all bespeaks a mood of great forlornness and

dejection. Perplexed with regard to his own mission, nay even with respect to God and his government, his soul lies in the midst of a thousand doubts and distressing reflections, like a swimmer in a raging sea where there is neither shore nor bottom. At the moment when we see him throw himself with a deep sigh, and with bitter and gloomy resignation, under the juniper tree, there appears but a step between him and the abyss of despair.

There he sits, with his hand on his weary and troubled brow, like an exile in the midst of the fearful solitude, like one cast off by God and man. There he sits, with fixed and vacant gaze, and he sees within gloomy visions and dreams dark dreams. His eyes are far away in the land of Israel; sad images and horrid scenes pass before them in melancholy procession. On Carmel he sees the people reeling in their impious orgies; Samaria, with one idol-temple after another, rises on the view; the streets of Jezreel resound with blasphemies against the living God and his servants; and Jezebel is drunk with the blood of the few believers that fall victims to her revenge. The altar on which the Lord answered by fire stands lonely and deserted; Baal is solemnly adored for sending the rain that has lately blessed the land; his votaries increase by thousands; and the last remnant of the ancient faith is forsworn amid horrid rites, that pave the way for a universal worship of idols and demons. Such are the visions that appal the prophet's mind and wheresoever he turns his eyes is the fearful darkness; there is no herald of God; no voice of a single prophet is lifted up in the wilderness. And now he begins to think, "Alas! why did I not remain? Why durst I flee and forsake my poor people?" And, if the distress of his spirit had not been already excited to the utmost, surely thoughts like these must have tended, like a wasting thunderbolt, to rend his heart asunder.

The pious servant of God has had enough of this vale of tears. He is heartily weary of its bitter paths and its fruitless labours. His soul longs for the Sabbath of rest. "It is enough," he sighs to Heaven; and his eyes glisten with

tears. "Lord it is enough. Take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers." Alas! who could have thought it, that this spiritual hero could become so weak and faint-hearted; the man who seemed invincible in the harness of his faith, and superior to every storm! But let it comfort us that even such a one as Elijah thus sat under the juniper-tree, and thought, in his despondency, that he could no longer bear the burden of life. "Lord, it is enough! Why should I tarry longer in this world of hopeless travail? My existence is useless. If my labours in Israel, amid such signs and wonders, have missed their aim, where shall they now be of any service? It is enough! Why should I be longer a witness here of the decline of thy kingdom from the earth? Therefore, Lord, take now my poor and troubled soul from me, for I am not better than my fathers. I hoped to see what many kings and prophets have desired to see, and have not seen it. But who am I, unworthy servant that I am, that I should venture to desire so great things at thy hand? Who am I, that, in presumptuous hope, I should promise myself a preference, for which saints, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear, have longed in vain? It is enough! Lord, make an end!"

Thus spake Elijah in unspeakable distress of mind. It was a wonderful mixture of feelings which gave birth to such a prayer. It was, indeed, no harmony; and yet, amidst the discord, the holiest, sweetest, tones arose that could breathe from the chords of a human soul. His prayer was not the joyful and peaceful utterance of a Simeon, "Lord! now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace!" nor the clear, calm, deep longing of a Paul, "I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ." But just as little was it the impatient and passionate cry of a Jeremiah, "Cursed be the day in which I was born!" or the violent and tumultuous outburst of a Job, "Let that day perish! let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it!" The temper of Elijah was more subdued, more gentle, and therefore not so unhappy as theirs. We hear

indeed, in the sound of his sighs, the harsh discords of a bitter vexation at his fruitless labours and deceived hopes ; but, at the same time, his words breathe a pathos of weeping love for the poor people, and a holy grief at the decline of the kingdom of God, in which we find the great prophet in his nobler features once more restored to us. It must be confessed there is something in his prayer like the low murmur of complaint against the Lord himself ; but we feel, nevertheless, in the same moment, that tears of regret are already pouring out to hush it in his heart ; and the soul, the instant the complaint drops from it, feels its sinfulness and sinks in deep contrition on account of it. Doubtless, we see, mirrored in the words " It is enough ! " the distraction of a soul which, being deceived in its fairest hopes, seems to despair of God and of the world, and is impatient and weary of the cross ; a soul which, like that of Jonah, frets and quarrels with the Almighty, and, by the desire of death, gives him as it were to understand that he has now brought it to such an extremity, that nothing is left it but the melancholy wish to take refuge from his severity in the grave. Nevertheless, in the soul of Elijah, this carnal longing was outstripped by a divine and believing aspiration, which, thirsting after God, struck its pinions upwards to the Eternal Light ; and the key-note of his troubled complaint was the filial thought that he would, by it, move the heart of his God and Father ; since that gracious Being could not hear it without being induced to shine forth from the darkness, and to revive by his smile the downcast spirit of his servant. Thus we see in the prayer of the prophet the elements of the natural and spiritual life fermenting together in strange intermixture. The sparks of nature and of grace, mutually opposing each other, blaze up together in one flame. The metal is in the furnace, the heat of which brings much impurity no doubt to light ; but who does not forget the scum and the dross at the ravishing sight of the purified silver, that shines like the gleam of a fairer world ?

" Lord, it is enough ! " Ah, this little prayer is known

also amongst us ! I know many a home of industry, many a chamber and couch of pain, from which, almost without interruption, this aspiration is sighed forth to heaven amid many tears and pangs. Many of these petitioners are in error, as Elijah was. No, it is not yet enough ! Many a faithful labourer has yet to learn that his labour is by no means in vain in the Lord, although he thinks it is. The path of many a just man is yet again to be brightened here below by the light which, contrary to God's express promise, he thinks is for ever extinguished. Many a broken instrument shall yet be used by the Lord for some work, ere He lays it aside in the land of silence ; and many a troubled sufferer shall, before his last farewell, once more take down his harp from the willows, and raise a song of thanksgiving to Him who is " wonderful in counsel and excellent in working." And then it will indeed be enough ! Ah, who can yet say with reason " It is enough !" It is never enough, till the Lord saith it. And though ye should have long years more, ye sufferers in Israel, in the furnace, as at this day, yet rest assured of it that ye shall at length acknowledge, in songs of triumph in heaven, that it was then only enough, and not a moment earlier, when the Lord stripped you of the faded garments of your pilgrimage, and took your souls home to himself.

One word more. As often as you begin to feel thus, and to say " It is enough !" as if you could no longer bear the burden of life, then do as Elijah did. Flee into silence and soildude, and I will shew you a tree under which to cast yourselves. It is the Cross. True, indeed, it is thick set with stings and prickles ; armed with nails and spikes that pierce the soul, and wound the corruption of nature to the heart. But this tree has a fragrance that revives the heart, the odour of a sweet smell that makes our offering acceptable unto God. This sacred tree spreads a shade that cools the burning fire of conscience, and repels the fiercest rays of the divine displeasure. And though it be an error, as is fabled of the juniper tree, that no serpent ventures near it, yet, of this " tree of life," it is a glorious truth Here



the viper of discontent will not fasten on thee; the old serpent shall not inject the poison of murmuring against God into thy soul. In the view of the Cross, it will never more enter thy thoughts to complain of the greatness of thy sufferings, for here thou seest an agony beside which thy own is not to be once named; and it is the Just One that suffers for thee, the unjust. In the view of the Cross, thou wilt soon forget all thy distresses; for the love of God in Christ Jesus, to a poor sinner like thee, will draw away thy thoughts and contemplations from all beside, and fix them on himself alone. Beneath the Cross, thou art safe from the thought "that some strange thing has happened thee," for "the disciple is not above his master," and as the Head of the body had to droop in sorrow, so also must the members. Beneath the Cross, thou art secure from all impatience, for there thou must rejoice that only a short suffering in time hath struck thee, and not the curse that fell so dreadful on thy Surety. Beneath the Cross, thy sadness will soon be lost in that peace of God which streams from this tree with the blood of the Lamb, and sinks into the ground of thy heart. And the far prospect that here opens before thee,—from the wilderness to thy heavenly home, that stands already wide to view,—and from the stormy ocean to the rest beyond, into which thy weary soul shall one day enter—O! this shall tinge all the clouds of thy life with the hues of a coming dawn, and, ere thou art aware, the rest of paradise shall spread its wing over thee, and the Cross shall transform itself into a Jacob's ladder, on which one blessed thought after another, like angels of God, shall descend into thy soul from the upper sanctuary.

Peace and pardon blended  
From the Cross down flow,  
Sorrow's reign is ended,  
Death is trampled low.  
Lift thy look of sadness,  
Sinner! up on high;  
Let thine ear drink gladness  
From thy Saviour's sigh.

Hark ! now all is finish'd,  
Fought thy fight of pain,  
Sin in Jesus punish'd,  
Burst the tempter's chain.  
All for thy receiving !  
Ope thy ready breast,  
Fear not unbelieving !  
Be the Cross thy rest.

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## II.—THE VISIT UNDER THE JUNIPER TREE.

“ Jerusalem is the city of the great King.” Thus saith the Lord, (Matt. v. 35).

Where is Jerusalem ? Wherever a tear of longing after God fills the eye, or the knee bows at the footstool of the throne of grace ; wherever the hands of faith are spread upward to the Cross, and an honest heart lisps the confession. “ My Lord and my God,”—there is Jerusalem.

Jerusalem ! thou beloved city, over which waves the blood-stained banner of the Cross ; thou art the joy of the earth, and thou alone. There is in it nothing fair, nothing noble, nothing venerable but Jerusalem. Who would dwell in this wilderness, if Jerusalem, with its peaceful tabernacles, did not stand in the midst of it ? What makes this life in a strange land endurable, nay, dear and precious ? It is Jerusalem.

Jerusalem ! O, it is good to be within thy walls, to sit together as fellow-citizens according to the dignity of the new birth, to take the harp and praise the Lord whose glory is great in the midst of us, to review together the blessed work of faith in our souls, and recount our treasures of which the world knoweth not ; or to place ourselves at the windows towards the east, and breathe the morning air of an eternal day, and gaze with rapture on the golden shadows of the land that “ is afar off.” O Jerusalem ! if I forget thee, let my right hand forget her cunning.

Where are the treasures of God opened, and the jewels of heaven spread forth to view ? Where burn the torches of eternal light ? Where are the well-springs of peace and

joy that cannot run dry? Where does the soul look into the opened book of life? Where does the rill of joy trickle from the flinty rocks, and the balm drop down that heals every wound? Where, but in Jerusalem? Therefore, blessed are all they, O Jerusalem, that love thee and pray for thy peace!

But what shall I say of the Jerusalem above, that lies beyond the river of death; where the everlasting palm-trees flourish, and the still waters flow through the green pastures, and the angels sing to their golden harps among the trees of paradise! Thither we are journeying, we happy pilgrims—from Jerusalem to Jerusalem. While *ye* that love not the father are journeying to Tophet, to the valley of destruction, to the blackness of darkness; *we* are going to full and cheerful day, and on our staff is inscribed “The citizenship of heaven;” and if we sometimes appear to you as those that dream, and you see our eyes glistening with tears as we gaze into the far blue distance, it is our longing for home, and all you can say is, “They are weeping after Jerusalem.”

And who has built us this city, and made it so beautiful for us? Jerusalem is the city of the great King. Thus he speaks, “Here is my rest for ever, here will I dwell.” He dwells there, and the city rests peacefully under the wings of his love. This day shall we advance in our pilgrimage toward Jerusalem.

1 Kings xix. 5—8.

“And as he lay and slept under a juniper-tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baked on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head: and he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. And the angel of the Lord came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.”

This narrative belongs to the children of God, especially to the afflicted. It may thus become to them like an angel charged with bread and water for them in the wilderness. The Lord's watchful care over his servants, espe-

cially in a dark and cloudy season, is here displayed in the most refreshing manner. This gracious divine protection is made apparent—I. In the answer to prayer which the apostle receives. II. In the appearance of an angel which the Lord sends to him. III. In the miraculous refreshment of which he partakes. IV. In the delightful prospect which God opens before him. V. In the supernatural strength given him for his journey through the desert. Let us devoutly meditate on these gracious manifestations of the tender loving-kindness of our God.

I. Elijah had wished for death, since life had no charm for him after the failure of his hopes of the regeneration of Israel. The love of life can indeed see many a star in our heaven expire before it is itself extinguished; it can outlive what is dearest, but it cannot survive hope. When Elijah sees this flower fading he sinks, and his heart is quite loosened from its hold of life; and had he not been a man of God, ah! who can tell into what more dreadful abyss than that of impatience and despondency he might have been plunged.

It appeared as if the Lord had suddenly given up his work in displeasure, and his prophet with it. The divine procedure had wrapt itself too thickly in the disguise of accident, for mortal eye to penetrate the veil. Yea, the care of Providence seemed to have quite withdrawn, and to have left the most unbounded room for the play of chance or human caprice; so it seemed to the prophet. He no longer understood the way of his God, and could see in such an unexpected turn of things neither aim nor plan. He found himself in a dark labyrinth, without lamp to light his way or clue to guide his footsteps. And if we reflect that the powers of darkness never let slip such times of trial to the children of God, and that the adversary, without question, harassed the wounded spirit of the prophet, under the juniper-tree, with many a fiery dart of unbelief, foul suggestion, and nameless horror, we shall easily understand how such a champion might then despond, and in the deepest gloom and di-

straction of spirit, nay, in the expression of a bitter disappointment, cry to Heaven, "Lord, it is enough, take now my life from me, for I am not better than my fathers."

Such prayers as these, sent up to heaven more in the wild tumult of carnal passion than by the sacred impulse of faith, and rising to God, not on the soft wings of faith and hope, but on the gusts of natural excitement, are not generally regarded by the Lord; yet, in his mercy, he does sometimes hear them, little as they deserve a gracious answer. Experience teaches us, that the Lord will not readily suffer his servants to finish their course amid gloom and disappointment. However fiercely their life may have been distracted, the stormy sky generally clears, the sun shines, before the haven of rest is entered; and if there is not a calm outwardly, yet within, and in the depths of the soul, all is settled peace. Listen, ye wounded and desponding souls, your hour will not come till the Lord has reconciled you to the dealings of his providence, and compelled you cheerfully to acknowledge that "He doeth all things well!" After the tempest shall come a great calm, though not perhaps till the very end of your pilgrimage, and after all your impatience and distrust, the cry of Simeon shall be heard from you, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace," and your despondency shall be changed into a willingness, even then, to bear the cross after your Lord, should he so order it. Not in tumult and in storm, but in the glorious light of a Sabbath dawn shall thy course be finished, and by the arms of rejoicing angels shall thy Divine Friend bear thee on high to the joy of the eternal hills; that his guidance may be adored, not only above, but here below, and his grace and faithfulness made glorious in the eyes of all.

This Sabbath dawn the prophet was not yet to see. The rash desire of his heart, the prompting of little faith and of sad dejection, was denied. His life was not taken away. He was yet to see glorious things, to learn again to praise the faithfulness of the God-Amen. to experience at last a

blessed rebuke for all his doubts and fears, to find the most joyful solution of all the riddles of the Divine providence, and to emerge into a splendour of revelation of the glory of God, such as had never before shone into his soul. And then it would be enough; then the hour would be come when, not under a solitary tree in the dreary wilderness, but in splendid triumph, he should be carried by an untried road over the dark valley into the land of eternal rest.

Would that we were less impatient when our gracious Father in heaven denies us our first requests; and less wilfully bent on obtaining, at his hands, all that we desire, and exactly at the time and in the way we desire it! How kind is it in Him to grant, not according to our will, but his own; and to condescend to so gracious a care over us, as to save us from the gratification of our own poor and ignorant wishes! Of this we may rest absolutely assured, that if ever we have prayed in vain, it has been either because we desired something that was a curse and not a blessing, or had implored a smaller blessing, when God was keeping a greater in store for us. How many a pious minister would never have experienced the Lord's faithfulness in crowning the labours of his servants, had the Lord called him away at the time when, in dark despondency, he desired it! How many a Christian pilgrim would have seen nothing of the manna that descends from heaven, and of the water that gushes from the flinty rocks, had God heard his trembling and distressful prayer, "That he might not be led into the wilderness!" How many a brother would this day be unable to rejoice that the power of Christ had so rested on him, if the thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan, had been taken away at the first time when he besought the Lord that they might depart! Therefore, be of good courage! Be assured, my brethren, that this No! with which some of our prayers are answered, will excite us hereafter to more fervent strains of thanksgiving than sometimes the Yes! which has crowned others. Beware, then, of tarrying too long under the juniper-tree. Beware

of the words, "It is enough!" Ye must first travel to Horeb; first hear the still small voice of peace. The night must be followed by morning; the fight with victory; the sowing in tears with the reaping in joy. First one experience, and another, and another, that shall force from us the confession, "O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee; but unto us confusion of face." And after that cometh the end; then the pilgrim's staff is dropped, and the longed-for "Now" of Simeon is heard.

Elijah did not die. His hour was not yet come. His prayer remained unheard, yet not wholly so. The prophet longed for rest, and rest he was to have, not however from the angel of death, but from the gentler wing of the angel of sleep. He lay down and slept under the juniper-tree. It was all one to him where he lay; on a silken couch, or on the bare heath; under a juniper-tree, or in a royal pavilion. The burthen of life was for a while lifted off him; visions of peace hovered around his soul; the cool shade breathed refreshment over him; all inward storms were hushed; grief and trouble fled away; and tormenting thoughts gave place to soothing dreams, till soul and body were locked in the same deep repose. Such pauses from labour fall to the lot of all who bear the cross. For us also in the midst of the wilderness can the Lord provide a chamber of rest, and make the howling of the storm for a little cease, or bring its fitful gusts like the falls of a lullaby upon the ear, and lay the burden off our shoulders for a season as a pillow of rest under our heads, on which we softly sleep and recruit our wasted strength. At one time the Keeper of Israel sends us bodily slumber on our couch which is watered with tears; and what a welcome guest may it not prove to us, especially if spiritual conflicts threaten to confuse our senses and shatter our nerves! At another time pleasant dreams perform to us the ministry of angels, and bear poor Lazarus into Abraham's bosom, or weary Jacob from his stony pillow up to the opened heaven. At another season some sympathizing Jonathan visits me in my lonely

sadness, and by his cheering converse I feel my spirits raised and my mind restored to its spring and vigour. Sometimes as by a sudden miracle of faith my chamber of pain is changed into a meeting-place of worthies of old; champion after champion gathers around me and bends towards me,—all bearers of the cross in their day like me, and they all found a happy deliverance, and their example shines before me like a pillar of fire, their experiences still revive me like the palms and fountains on the pilgrim's way. Sometimes a comforting verse finds me out, or a hymn rises to my mind, like David with his potent harp, chasing away my gloom; or a promise of God's word paints itself like a rainbow on the clouds of my soul, and Hope lights up my darkness with its golden radiance. In short, the very days of storm and tempest have their hours of repose and mercy, and even on the foaming billows the Lord can provide for his children an ark of peace. Therefore let no one be troubled, however steep his path, and thorny and rough his road! When his weary knees are ready to sink, God will know how to provide him a place of rest; and in some sense it will be true of him, as is said here of Elijah, "that he lay and slept under a juniper-tree;" and though these pauses may be but short, we see from them how easy it would be for Him, if he pleased, to deliver us in a moment from all our trouble; and when our hearts are once settled in the faith of this, the bitterness of trouble is past.

II. The man of God lies fast asleep under the juniper tree. Who could be more forsaken and desolate? But a divine watch is over him, and he may sleep secure. As he lies thus unconscious under the green shade, a shining form, with majestic movements, draws gently and unobserved to his side. It is a messenger from heaven. With a silent pause of love and respect he stands for a moment before the prophet and looks tenderly on his pale, care-worn, slumbering face; he then bends down, touches him gently, and says, "Arise and eat." The sacred narrative



calls our attention to this incident with a "Behold !" It is indeed a striking spectacle. Amid the dreary waste, marked only by stunted shrubs and hills of sand, behold an angel of God, who no doubt regarded it as a high honour to bring help and refreshment amid his trouble to a servant of the King of kings. O Israel ! a people saved by the Lord, who is like unto thee ? Flaming spirits minister unto thee ; messengers of heaven are charged with the supply of thy necessities. Where thy path is lonely, it becomes most full of a higher company ; and where men quit thy society, thou art surrounded by the hosts of Mahanaim. Where the world shuts thee out, heaven opens for thee ; where thy knees sink, the everlasting arms bear thee up. What a wonderful mixture of meanness and dignity in the condition of the children of God ! If I asked you for the most venerable spots and interesting scenes in the world, where would you direct me ? One, perhaps, would point to where the gilded domes of the cathedral rise ; another, to where the towers of palaces stand forth in majesty. One would turn to the halls of wisdom and science ; another, to the splendid store-houses, where the wealth and art of the world are treasured. But I would rather point you to the spot where a Magdalene lies weeping at the feet of Jesus, or a poor sinner is rejoicing over the pardon he has received ; where a Lazarus dwells, or a Martha and a Mary, the friends of Jesus. Though the walls be but of clay and the roof of straw ; here is a Bethel, here is no less than the house of God. Here dwelleth a royal priesthood clad in the beauty of the Eternal King ; high and invisible guests pass to and fro ; and eternal love overshadows them with her wings !

The action of the angel in awaking the prophet and saying to him, "Arise and eat," may be spiritually applied to many among ourselves. Though the weary pilgrim stands in great need of refreshment, he does not feel his want of it, and requires to be excited by the influence of God's providence or grace. An afflicted soul may often need nothing so much as the word of God, and yet may

go on brooding on its own trouble till it is ready to perish of spiritual famine, and yet all the while be insensible of its error. He may scarcely open the Bible, or attend on Divine ordinances, or listen to one word of religious conversation, and all from the idea that these things are not suited to his state. This is a truly melancholy and pitiable condition ; and while we should not rashly judge of it, as indicating a total absence of grace, we ought to use all wise efforts to recal the unhappy sufferer from his culpable delusion ; and above all, to cry mightily to the Lord for deliverance. He alone can open the inlets of spiritual sense anew, and bid the famished sufferer “ arise and eat ;” and then the appetite returns, the bread and the water of life are eagerly sought for ; the soul once more returns to its habits of devotion and feels its joys. It goes forth amid the green pastures, and rests beside the still waters. The countenance of the Lord again shines upon it, and it is saved.

III. “ Arise and eat,” said the angel. And Elijah awoke, “ and as he looked round, behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head ; and he did eat and drink, and laid him down again.” He could have wished for nothing more, all lonely and outcast as he was in the terrible wilderness. Such is the tender compassion of our God. Thus “ He gives it to his beloved *sleeping*.” But who gives God the glory due unto his name, or believes that he is thus able to help us without our own aid ? How hard a precept does that of the apostle appear to many, “ Be careful for nothing : but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God ; casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you !” We stand before such a counsel, as on the brink of a dark abyss ; and we feel as if we must inevitably sink, if we venture into its depths. Could we but find some artificial support of our own righteousness, we would then be less timid ; but we dare not trust all to the promised grace of God. But how great is the sin and loss

of thus distrusting God? and how naturally does it follow that we see not many mighty works by reason of our unbelief? The remarkable interpositions in favour of Elijah we are too apt to regard as the prodigies of an early age of wonder and of mystery, long since gone by; and hence, instead of the song of Moses, and the timbrel-sounds of Miriam, we hear almost nothing but sighs over worldly embarrassments, disappointed prospects, and unprosperous undertakings, with which the tabernacles of the righteous are filled. Would that we could glory more in our infirmities, that the power of Christ might rest upon us!

The bread and water with which God nourishes souls in the wilderness is his word. But as the bread and water were first made ready for Elijah by the angel, so must the truths of the word be prepared for us by the Spirit of God. And how refreshing do we find those truths, when, after long famine of the word of God, we again are privileged to approach the spiritual table, and feed on that Bread which is given for the life of the world. We can then thank the Master of the feast even for our long season of hunger and of thirst, as necessary to make us value aright the constant supply of the heavenly manna, and to keep us from saying, with the unbelieving Jews of old, "Our soul loatheth this light food."

Elijah, apparently more asleep than awake, stretched out his hand, ate of the bread, drank of the water, and sank down again, weak and weary, and fell asleep. Strange that so mighty a miracle should not have greatly surprised him, and affected his whole soul. But no! we discern not the slightest trace of astonishment. He partakes of the refreshment, not as if he were lying in a dreary and desolate wilderness, but as if he were at home in his own chamber. Or, perhaps, he was, like Mary Magdalene at the sepulchre, absorbed in higher thoughts; and as the appearance of the risen Saviour made no greater impression on her absent mind than if he had been one of the servants of the garden, so the glory of the seraph fell powerless on the deadened vision of the prophet, whose inward eye was

fixed on the dark void in his heart, from which his God had disappeared.

The return of the prophet to slumber is of a piece with the spiritual experience of many. They may be suddenly awakened, in the midst of spiritual darkness, to hear the word of consolation, and may take a hasty draught of the blessed waters of promise ; but the enjoyment is but for a moment. It is like a passing meteor, which lights up the darkness, but does not dispel it. Yet this sudden gleam of comfort is not without its use. Secret strength is inspired into the soul, were it by nothing more than the quickening of the persuasion that he who can send one ray of light in so dark a sky could, at any moment, pour into the benighted soul the full sunshine of peace.

The sleep of Elijah reminds us, too, of many of our unhappy hearers who are still spiritually asleep, and who have never yet experienced the deep awakening of conversion. They eat and drink ; in other words, they hear much that is good, they neglect no sermon, they read the Bible, they engage in all the exercises of devotion, but, alas ! all seems lost upon them, and no fruit unto life ever appears. They may have slight touches and momentary awakenings from the Spirit of God. But with these it fares no better, for they sink afresh into the slumber of death. Yet, let no one say, before the end, that such persons have eaten and drunk in vain. They may suddenly prove the contrary, and put your rashness to shame. The fruit of many old impressions may mingle itself with some new and striking one, and produce a blessed change with all the suddenness of a second birth.

IV. "The angel of the Lord" then "came the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat ; because the journey is too great for thee." Thus faithful is our God, who never suffers his servants to be tempted above what they are able to bear, but supplies them beforehand with strength and refreshment, ere they are sent forth to fight his battles ; and as the trial does not come without

the gracious strengthening, so the season of special gladdening and growth in grace is designed to introduce some signal proof of faith, or some deadly struggle with the enemy, as the largess and equipment of the soldier precede the hour of heroic and desperate enterprise.

“Eat and drink,” said the angel, “because the journey is too great for thee.” When Elijah heard these words, his soul was at once revived, and sleep and weariness disappeared. There was one word in the angel’s address which found a ready way to his heart, and moved him more deeply than all the splendour of the heavenly visitant, or the greatness of the miracle which he had experienced. That was the word “journey.” Hitherto he had seemed to be wandering at random, without commission or guidance from the Lord. He had “devised his own way,” and it had seemed to him no better than a succession of errors, the sport of chance and of human caprice; and now he learns all at once that he had been all the while on a “journey” of God’s appointment, and that as the end was fixed in the Divine purpose, so also must have been the beginning. His God is thus restored to him in all his providence and grace; he starts up in the strength of a renewed commission, and sets forward, not “whither he would,” but in the name of the God who had called him by his grace. Those of us only who have shared the prophet’s experience, can tell how supremely blessed it is, after a season of wandering in darkness, and sighing with David, “I am sorrowful and forsaken,” all at once to discover some proof of the Divine love that cannot be mistaken, some sense of the Divine guidance that forces itself in upon our deepest uncertainty, and convinces us that we are not tossed without rudder or compass on a stormy sea, but that Christ is with us in the vessel, and that the lights in heaven are again displayed to guide us over the trackless deep. Then “is our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing,” and we exclaim in the language of Asaph, “Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none in all the earth that I desire besides thee.”

V. Look now at our prophet. We find him once more, the old Elijah, with his firm step and erect bearing. "He went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb, the mount of God." He travels through the sandy desert alone, and yet not alone, ignorant of his course, and yet free from care. Forty days and nights he travels on, without rest or intermission, through the silent waste; a miraculous journey made in the strength of the food and drink of which he had partaken under the juniper-tree. To help by many means, or by few, or with none at all, is one and the same thing to Him who upholdeth all things "by the word of his power." He who can multiply the food of the body by a word, can, without food, uphold the frame in health and vigour. In short, Elijah had no need, during the whole journey, either to eat and drink or to halt and take repose. His feet were not weary; his eyes were not enfeebled. The hot-wind of the day did not exhaust him; nor did the damps of the night chill his vigour. Hill and rock were lightly surmounted; waves of sand did not engulf him; he followed on the daring track of the ostrich and the gazelle, as over level and familiar paths. He thus bore about with him, in the unshrinking buoyancy of his spirit, and unexhausted strength of his body, an abiding seal and pledge, that the Lord was with him, and that the hand of the Almighty sustained him,

The desert over which Elijah travelled forty days and forty nights, was the same in which the Israelites had formerly wandered forty years, under the guidance of the pillar of cloud and of fire. Surely this, if any, was to a Hebrew classic ground. But to the prophet it was more, it was holy ground; scattered over with bright foot-prints; rich beyond every other scene in grand and cheering recollections; and marked out beyond all other places on the earth's surface by the most stupendous works and manifestations of the living God. Here the whole miraculous history of the fathers of old lived again before him in the liveliest colours; at every step and halting-place the

lonely desert became peopled with venerable and sacred forms; a hoar antiquity would rise before him in the life and dream-like distinctness of yesterday; and still as he moved on, fresh scenes and images would crowd upon him from the departed age of wonders, and he would see a holy memorial of it in every object within view. Every mountain would rise like an eternal witness to the marvels of the past, and the total silence that reigned around would seem like the deep musing of nature on the sublime events of which she had once been the theatre. As often as he descended into a green and watered vale, he alighted in spirit on some resting-place of his fathers; as often as the shades of an overhanging rock received him, it was as if the incense of a sanctuary floated around him, for the sacrifice of the pilgrim had hallowed these shades. As often as a solitary cluster of palms rose before him on the plain, the thought might startle him, that here Moses had rested and taken counsel amidst the sacred circle of the elders; and wherever his way lost itself in the gloom of the acacia and tamarisk grove, his heart might be thrilled by the suggestion, that in this green temple the leader of Israel was still kneeling before the Lord, and speaking to Him "as a man talketh with his friend." Thus one thought after another would make the heart beat high. The history of the forty years' journey attained a life and a reality entirely new; thought passed into sight; memory was quickened into experience. At one time he would lie on the ground and gather the manna with the ancient fathers; at another, he would stand with the wounded before the brazen serpent, and feel the pulses of life again run through his veins. Now he would stand before the altar which Moses built, and called it "Jehovah Nissi" (the Lord my banner); and now he would hear the wide waste resound with loud thanksgivings and solemn hymns of praise to the faithfulness of Jehovah. Every new scene on which he entered would bring before him some new event and feature of those journeyings which were irradiated with the glory of God; and all the comfort, refresh-

ment, and impulse, which these histories contain, would rush upon him like a mighty stream from hill and valley, overwhelming him with a sublime and awful joy, that gave wings to every footstep, and banished the last remains of fear and care from his spirit. The wilderness blossomed as the rose, and all its plains broke forth into singing. Assured in his deepest conviction that he was pursuing his way under the same shadow of the Almighty which covered the host of Israel, he journeyed cheerfully onward, not doubting that He, who, under the juniper-tree, had sounded the note of his departure, and endued his feeble frame with a strength which no violence of the elements or fatigue of travel could impair, would lead him all the way by the right hand of his righteousness, and at last shew him his place of rest, and take from him the staff of his pilgrimage in peace.

O Faith, Faith ! Thou dear and sacred companion of the children of God ! Thy wondrous power dispels all the horrors of the wilderness, and the deepest solitude under thy blessed guidance is no longer solitary. The fairest that earth possesses, or that dwells in heaven, is thine ; thou goest forth in search of it, into height and into depth, to enrich with their treasures the poverty of thy friends. Thou bringest the distant near ; thou discloseth the hidden things of God ; thou awakenest the past to a new life. Under thy hand the gloomy present melts away into the light of a blessed hereafter, and the clouds of this mortal horizon are mantled all over with the dawning radiance of better worlds to come. In the lonely wastes of our cheerless pilgrimage, thou charimest into being for us the freshness and the glory of paradise. Our most deserted corner, thou peoplest with holy, with heavenly company ; thou bridgest over with thy wondrous span all the chasms which sever world from world, and age from age, and throwest down all the partition walls that rise between our Now and our Hereafter, our Earth and our Heaven. In thy light the history of the past is wrought into our present life, and our present life is exalted to a sacred history.



Through thee the dead are not dead to us ; our departed ones have not taken farewell ; the saints of old are our brethren of to-day and yesterday, though their bones are resting in the graves of centuries. By thee, though dead, they yet speak to us ; by thee, they visit us in our hours of darkness with the looks and voices of a heavenly sympathy ; by thee, we see them encamped about us, a holy cloud of witnesses ; and, by thee, all the goodness and truth that have passed before them, becomes our own. Thou supportest us on Abraham's promises ; thou makest us lean on Jacob's staff ; by thee, we cleave the sea with the rod of Moses ; and by thee, we leap in the gracious triumph of David over rampart and wall. O Faith, Faith ! Thou keeper of the door of every sanctuary, thou steward over all the treasures of God ! May He who is thy Author draw nigh unto us, and he who is thy Finisher bend down towards us !

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### III.—THE ARRIVAL AT MOUNT HOREB.

The life of almost every Christian has striking points of light scattered over it, which may be called its moments on Tabor. In these moments the children of God appear in unveiled dignity ; the likeness of the Divine nature, which they bear within them, breaks through the garb of their humiliation ; a preternatural exaltation is diffused over the whole being ; and their thoughts, and feelings, and words, and actions, all soar above the common ground of their experience.

Such a moment it was in the life of the apostle Paul, when he could utter these words, " For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." The expression is truly startling ; and whatever idea we form of the extent of the curse, it conveys an amount of self-sacrifice altogether incalculable. We have a like instance in the case of Moses, who, fired with a holy zeal, and carried away by the ar-

dour of a love in which self was totally forgotten, broke forth into the amazing exclamation, " Yet now, if thou wilt forgive them their sins; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book." If our cool, sober, calculating people of the present day find it hard to comprehend these ecstatic expressions, it is no great wonder; but neither is it a proof that these holy men were not deeply in earnest with their astonishing requests. An infant is incompetent to enter into the ideas of a valiant warrior; still there were such men as Gideon and David. Even Paul and Moses, after the moment of divine ecstasy was past, may have been astonished at their own excitement, and unable to comprehend the mysterious working of their own minds in it; for they were then carried far beyond the natural course of their desires, and they could not reproduce the exalted feeling at their pleasure.

You know, besides Paul and Moses, a third who shared their feelings in a far higher degree, and who actually carried the desire into effect, which they only uttered in a moment of rare excitement; of him it is written, " He was made a curse for us." Many who are called Christians shake their heads at this truth, and cannot believe of the Lord Jesus that his love went so far as to lead him to undergo the penalty for our sins, which would have swallowed up and consumed the sinners themselves. Were these adversaries of the atonement in the right, it would follow that these disciples, Moses and Paul, were above their Master in love to mankind. Therefore, from this very love of them, we can shew our opponents that they are in the wrong. For from whom had these men of God their fervent love, from themselves? Certainly not. It was a drop from the ocean of the Saviour's love; as then the stream is, so must the fountain be; as the copy, so the original. In the Saviour's heart there must then have dwelt a love which prompted him to make himself a curse for sin, else how could such love have been found in his disciples?

The recollection, however, of such a love as this, on the

part of Moses and of Paul, is not altogether advantageous to the prophet Elijah, in comparing the scene of his life on which we are now about to enter, for it presents a striking contrast to the conduct of these two saints.

1 Kings xix. 9—11.

“ And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there : and, behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah ? And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts : for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword ; and I, even I only, am left ; and they seek my life to take it away. And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks, before the Lord ; but the Lord was not in the wind : and after the wind an earthquake ; but the Lord was not in the earthquake.”

Here we have the man of God again before us in a situation calculated to increase the depth of his humility. The particulars of this striking scene are well worthy of our close consideration. We have here—I. The night's lodging in the cave. II. The Divine reproof. III. The prophet's complaint. IV. The summons to appear before the Lord.

I. We left the prophet travelling on in the wilderness, filled with many recollections of its ancient history, and agitated with many questions as to the probable issue of his journey, and its ultimate design in his prophetic life. And now, when the forty days are drawing to a close, he sees a mountain in the azure distance glistening before him, which soon becomes better known to him, not less by its height than by its white and shining summits. It was Mount Sinai ; towering up with its bold cliffs like an immense cathedral with innumerable spires. Another height near it appeared like its ante-chamber, not so tall, but as bold in its formation of wild and craggy steeps. This was Horeb. What must have been the emotions of Elijah on first beholding these sacred and ever memorable heights. What elevating thoughts and delightful hopes may then have rapt away his soul ! He resigns himself to the pleas-

ing expectation, that this Horeb was to be the end alike of his wanderings and of his troubles. In this ancient scene of revelation he hopes to find the richest requital for all his vexing failures; the most comforting solution of all the mysteries of his life; the most glorious assurance of the restoration of Israel to their ancient faith. It was on Horeb that Moses was honoured to behold the glory of Jehovah in the burning bush; and Elijah expected nothing less than the display of the good-will of "Him that dwelt in the bush." It was on Horeb that the rock was smitten which refreshed the thirsty hosts of Israel; and Elijah would think of the living water which would revive his soul. It was on Horeb that the uplifted hands of Moses prostrated the strength of Amalek, and gave Joshua his glorious-victory over the armies of the aliens; and Elijah might hope to hear in Horeb the sentence against Ahab and the heathen Jezebel, which should put down blasphemy and rebellion in Israel. On Horeb God renewed his covenant with his people, after he had delivered them from the iron furnace of Egypt; and on Horeb Elijah might expect the renewal of his own commission from Jehovah, with the aids and promises necessary to a complete work of reformation.

At length he reaches the holy mountain. With the profoundest veneration he begins to climb the rocky ridges and rises to its summit. It is evening. His feet stand upon Horeb. His soul is overwhelmed with the most varied emotions; but he prays to God, and anxiously waits for the expected manifestation. His hopes are not realized. There is many a bush, but in none does he see the fire; and many a rock, but from none do the waters flow. No sound of Divine footsteps on the dull and silent ridges that rise all around him. He would give way again to the gloom of the wilderness, but he cannot look on the heavenly vision that led him hither as a play of fancy or a delusion of darkness; he knows that the Lord has conducted him to Horeb, and he will wait his time. An indescribable solitude stretches around him; nothing but

rugged layers of stone, tangled thickets, and here and there a gloomy cypress or dusky tamarisk. On all sides dark chasms and abysses appeared, rocks hollowed into dismal caverns, scarcely the song of a bird in the stunted brakes, but everywhere a silence as in a field of the dead, broken only by the cry of the wild-goat on the peaks of the crags, or the rustling of the loose shingle down the steeps, under the light hoof of the mountain-antelope. Alas! the pious wanderer might be at a loss what to think of his situation, and might look on himself as banished from the whole world. No trace of a human dwelling is any where to be seen. The horror of his lonely situation is increased by the approach of night. Ought he to travel on? He cannot. He feels that the limit of his journey is reached. The strength which bore him through the desert, perhaps, has forsaken him, and no less so, the cheerful spirit and the courage of the pilgrim; and, therefore, nothing is left him but to seek out some retreat which may shelter him from wild beasts and poisonous serpents. He wraps his mantle around him, creeps into a gloomy cave, of which there were many in this rocky region, and lies down in order to pass the night in this melancholy lodging. No doubt it was one of the anxious nights of his life, for the cheering prospect he had entertained of dwelling in the pavilion of the Lord's glory was disappointed; and he was obliged to bury himself amidst the most comfortless circumstances in the horrors of a desolate cavern. It may be easily supposed that no sleep closed the prophet's eyes this melancholy night. Satan, too, would assail him with the most horrid images and suggestions, and summon up all his strength to overcome his hard-trying and perhaps wavering faith, and to pierce him with his fiery darts. For the circumstances of the case gave the Old Serpent a great advantage; and he might deem it easy to prove the love of God a delusion, the promises of God a broken reed; as if the Keeper of Israel "could himself slumber," and his paternal kindness admit of his chastening his children without cause. "Where is now thy God?"

might he press upon Elijah. "Where is the boasted happiness of his service?" might he ask in scorn; and who knows whether the prophet was now ready for the conflict, and able to repel with decision all the thrusts of the subtle tempter? Yes; had the invisible arms not been under him, which were wont to uphold him, when he was least aware of it, he would have been swallowed up in the gulph of despair.

II. Elijah retires into the cave and experiences the truth of the lesson, that God's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor his ways our ways; and farther, that self-humiliation must precede all advancement. What his feelings were, no one can presume to tell. Suddenly, in the deep silence, the word of the Lord comes to him as a shot from a bow, piercing to the very heart. "And the word of the Lord came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?" The voice makes the prophet start, for he knew it to be that of the Almighty God. But what an unexpected question was this? What a painful contrast to the expectations that he had brought with him to Horeb! Had he not thought that the whole journey from Samaria was approved of God, and that he had been expressly called to the Mount of Horeb to receive these peculiar blessings from the Lord! and now, instead of a welcome, he is met by the alarming inquiry, "What doest thou here?" It must however, painful as it was, have served to deepen his sense of his own blame-worthiness in leaving his post at first, and following his own will rather than that of God. It must have reproved his feeble faith and his despondency, and quenched the last murmur against the Divine sovereignty in his soul.

When it goes ill with us in the world, my friends, and we begin to raise our notes of complaint over disappointed hopes and ruined enterprises, God can do us no better service than disclose to us the sins and offences against him which lie at the bottom of our disasters; if we have no such discovery made to us, we run great hazard of distrusting the

faithfulness of the Lord without cause. But this sense of guilt is the best preservative against that "pricking in the reins," of which Asaph complains (Psal. lxxiii. 21.), and the surest antidote to our unhappy lamentations over the darkness of God's ways. This teaches us patience, and makes us heartily thankful when the Lord causes but one ray of pardon, one glimpse of grace, to shine upon us, so that we desire nothing besides, and falling at his feet, renounce all murmuring for ever, in the deep confession, "O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us shame and confusion of face." Dan. ix. 7, 8.

What doest thou here! A question like this coming direct from God, has made many a one quake with a salutary fear. How awful must it sound to the sinner, as it overtakes him in the road of death, and he knows for the first time, to his consternation, that the call is from the Lord. How severely tender when it comes in the milder accents of ill-requited love to the prodigal amid the husks of sense; who, though bought with a price, has faithlessly forsaken his most faithful friend. How disquieting is it when this question surprises us in the midst of the children of God, and holds forth the possibility that we have mistaken our circle; and how keen may be the struggle of self-examination thus produced. Thus the Lord makes use of this question as a trumpet-note to awake the careless; as a warning missile sent to drive back the straying sheep to the flock; as a net to gather out the elect from among the unbelieving crowd; and as a chain to bind the penitent to his yoke, that they err no more from the paths of duty and safety. Alas! how many poor souls among us are wandering in error, and ready to "stumble upon the dark mountains." Would that the voice of the Almighty would this day sound the question in their ears, "What doest thou here?" that he would utter it in thunder and in storm, and meet them with it in "every refuge of lies," till they are chased out of all, and taught to find the way of peace, which hitherto they have not known.

III. The prophet at length collects himself, and replies to the alarming question, "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts." This indeed was true, and he could say with the Psalmist, "The zeal of thy house hath eaten me up." Alas ! how little is to be seen in this Laodicean age, of such zeal for the Lord ! We can see much and hear much that is contrary to God, ere our cold heart is warmed with holy indignation. How readily can we judge those that are without, and exalt ourselves above them, while, all the while, there is in us no godly jealousy for the Lord's name ! Where is the passionate zeal with which the ancient saints, day and night, gave the Lord no rest till he should make his name great among all nations, and before the eyes of all people ! Where is the self-consuming fervour of Moses, who exclaimed, "Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sins, and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book." May the good Lord have mercy on us, and rebuke our dulness, and send a wholesome tide of zeal with its currents and its waves into the stagnant waters of our formal Christendom !

"The children of Israel," continues Elijah, "have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword." Now, if this be a cause for zeal in God's name, why do we remain so lukewarm and faint-hearted ? Why do we not glow and burn, and breathe forth the holy flame ? Are not the banners of rebellion against God flaunting openly enough around us, and are not scoffers and blasphemers, who have forsaken his covenant, all too rife ? Must the name of God be still more openly profaned than it has been already, in word and deed, among us ? and must the measure of iniquity be yet more full, ere we have cause to wrestle with God that he would stir up his strength and might to avenge his own great name ? Would that the Lord would season our salt that has lost its savour, and baptize us with the Holy Ghost, and with fire ! The cause is, that we live too much in words and forms, and keep our hearts with too little diligence. How can the fuel of zeal be kindled without



the secret fires of meditation and prayer? How can we then expect to say with Jeremiah, "I am pained at my very heart;" or it was "in my heart a burning fire, shut up in my bones; and I was weary with forbearing, and was unable to restrain myself." Jer. iv. 19, xx. 9.

Elijah says, farther, "I, even I, only am left." The only one, he means, in the field of battle; for he was not the only saint of God in Israel; only the rest were fled, and had concealed themselves amid the rocks and caves. "And they seek my life to take it away." He thus makes no secret of it, that he has left Samaria and fled into the wilderness to save his own life; he narrates the whole, as it occurred, with sincerity and candour; and God is gracious to those who thus confess the truth, for "to the upright he will shew himself upright." Interesting in this light as the confession is, it is far from being entirely blameless in its tone. However much holy indignation it displays at the dishonour done to Jehovah's name, there mingle in it discords of more human vexation and fretfulness; and it betrays an excitement of natural temper, which, to say the least of it, had not its source in the spiritual affections of the prophet. Moses and Paul, as we have already hinted, appear in this instance much greater than Elijah. He does not throw himself into the breach for the idolatrous people of Israel, and offer himself as a victim for them; but appears, on the contrary, in a certain sense, their accuser before the Lord. This is, perhaps, only, however, a lower *attainment* than theirs; but it was a positive *sin* that he recounted his own zeal, and contrasted with it his total want of success, in a tone which was no other than one of reproach to God himself. As if he had said, "Lord, why hast thou done this to me? How couldst thou leave thy servant thus in his hour of need? How forsake the work of thine own hands?" The Lord has resolved, however, to answer these accusations himself; and answer him he will in a way of majesty, and yet of grace, which will preserve him all his life after from such mistakes.

IV. And now the Divine summons comes, "And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord." The prophet advanced to the mouth of the cave. But what he saw, and what he heard, on this wonderful occasion, must be deferred till afterwards.

"Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord." This Divine injunction, I could wish that you also, in a certain sense, would lay to heart. It is addressed to all who are dwelling, like Elijah, in dens and caves; and many are the dens and caves in which we bury ourselves. Our heart is such a cavern, and it is a dark one. Happy he who is aware of this, and whose eyes are no strangers to the darkness, disorder, and corruption of this great deep. But he must not seek to bury himself in it; this would be a perverse and ruinous error. Many among us have often done so, and imprisoned themselves in this dark dungeon. How great their folly! They see nothing but the darkness of the cave; meditate on nothing but the deadness, depravity, poverty, and helplessness of their souls; and, since they get no farther, their lips are never free of complaint, their eyes of heaviness, their soul of despondency, and their whole life of gloom and misery. To all such I would say, "Go forth!" In your hearts you will find neither life, nor light, nor peace. Forth, forth with you, from this gloomy cell. Stand upon the mount that smokes with the blood of sacrifice; behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. Behold his heart of love, behold his all-sufficient merit. It is this which makes the believer courageous, joyful, and strong. This is the life of the world. You complain that you find still so much wanting that should be there; no humility, no just hatred of sin, no love, no tears, no faith. Well, and what then? Can you suppose that you will make up the want by brooding in secret over that very want itself? In vain. Forth with you from your cavern to the mount of God. Under the Cross, and there only—at the throne of mercy, and there only—are these saving graces found.

In just such another cave are those souls to be found

who are troubled with sore temptations, and incited to horrid actions. He that is absorbed in the painful consideration of these things, and lingers amid the dismal shades of these temptations, looking only at the fiery darts which crowd upon him, is shutting himself up in a gloomy cavern, and drawing backward into the gulf of despair. Nay; let us go forth out of the cave! Let us stand upon the mount before the Lord, where the Saviour agonizes in bloody sweat, and wrestles in the deadliest conflict with Satan, that temptation may no longer prevail over you. In the mount the Lord shall be seen as having "spoiled principalities and powers, and made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in his Cross." Behold the mighty Conqueror, in whom you too have overcome; bring all your wretchedness before him; roll your burden upon him; and thus shall your courage be nerved for the struggle, and it shall be given you, even when most feeble, to triumph in your exalted Head!

Another cave is worldly distress or outward trouble; in the various shapes of poverty, loss, reproach, and sickness. To look with Peter on the storm, and not on its Ruler; with Martha, on the grave of corruption, and not on Him who is the resurrection and the life; this is to thrust yourselves into the gloomy cave. There is neither joy nor peace in that dungeon. It can only make desponding and wretched prisoners of you. Go forth! go forth! rise on the wings of faith and hope; take your stand on the mountain of the eternal promises, and cast your eyes thence over to the other side of Jordan into the peaceful borders of the land of promise, which you are soon to enter upon, and strengthen your soul with the glorious prospect of that blessed multitude "which no man can number, who have come out of great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Breathe no more the pestilential vapours of the prison-house, but the fresh air of that eternal morning which is soon to dawn!

O that in all our grief and misery, as often as we are tempted to sit down amid the shades of darkness, the

loud inspiring call were to sound in our ears, "Go forth, and stand on the mount before the Lord." Yes; to stand upon the mount of Calvary, to stand upon the mount of promise, and to stand there before the Lord with open heart, without reserve, deceitfulness, or guile, this is the grand secret of peace in time, and bliss in eternity; and if, besides, you will have a hiding-place and a safe retreat, let it be in the secret of the Lord's tabernacle, in the pavilion of the Most High. O the blessedness of this seclusion, the delights of this resting-place of the soul! Here is the service of a constant Sabbath in the calm sanctuary of the heart; here is the gleam of hope in the uplifted eye, even when all without is darkness; even then, yea then, most of all, when the sound of the last trump shall break upon our graves with the joyful summons, "Go forth, and stand on the heavenly mount before the Lord."

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#### IV.—THE MANIFESTATION ON HOREB.

The children of God in this world stand in a very close and wonderful connexion with Christ their Lord, and with each other. This connexion consists not merely in unity of sentiment, of faith, and of practice; the communion of saints is a deep and blessed mystery, and is justly placed in the creed as one of the articles of the Christian faith.

The Saviour has assured us that believers are *one*, even as He and the Father are one. They are elsewhere represented as forming one body, united to the one glorious Head in heaven. Thus Paul says, 1 Cor. xii. 27, "Ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." "If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it;" or "one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it." In other passages he carries this image still farther, and expressly calls the union thereby represented, a *mystery*.

Now, all to whom this mystery is unfolded, find in it a rich and exhaustless treasure. That all of us, who believe

the truth, form one body ; O, this is one of the most consoling and refreshing truths of the whole gospel ! But how far does this extend ? you ask. I shall shortly endeavour to make this manifest. We often hear you complaining thus, “ I certainly cannot deny that God has drawn me to himself ; but I dare not appropriate this or that particular consolation or promise. It may belong to others, but not to me.” These are foolish ideas, my friends. You speak as if every Christian stood alone, and could possess something in which other Christians had no part whatever ; whereas, according to Scripture, every Christian is an inseparable part of the whole ; and the promises are made not to this or that individual member, but to the whole body, that spiritual body of Christ, to which the weakest Christian belongs as really as the strongest. Ask no longer then, Am I a beginner in the Christian course, or an advanced and experienced pilgrim ? Am I strong in the inward man, or weak and infirm ? The divine inheritance does not depend on the measure of our grace, or the degree of sanctification we have attained. Ask no other question but this, “ Dare I reckon myself among the little flock of Israel ?” and if thou canst answer this question in the affirmative, then, whether thou art the greatest in the kingdom of heaven or the least, the first or the last, thou hast equally the right to apply to thyself, without scruple, all that is promised anywhere in the Bible to the people of God. If you read, for example, that the Lord declares of his church that the gates of hell shall not prevail against her, do not hesitate to include yourself in the promise, and to say, “ I am invincible ;” for what is said of the whole applies also to you the part. If you read of the city of God, that “ God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved : the Lord shall help her, and that right early ;” then think, “ God is with me, I shall not be moved ; he shall help me early ;” for thou art a citizen of Zion, as truly as ever Abraham, or John, or Paul was. Thus, my friends, we must acquire the habit of contemplating ourselves, not as isolated individuals standing

alone, but as parts of one whole, as members of one body. And when you read of a brother in the Lord being heard in prayer, wonderfully delivered, or favoured with some signal display of grace, you must not say, "Ah, that fell to his lot, but he is quite unconnected with me." No, my brethren, we must then rejoice and think, "This benefit has accrued at the same time to me, the Lord has equally shewed his grace and nearness to me. I also have received, in what has been bestowed upon my brother, a new seal and pledge of the loving-kindness of my God towards me ; for I and my brother are one, we belong to one and the same indivisible body, and if one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it."

You see then, my friends, what abounding consolation lies in the doctrine, that we are all one body ; and O, what a new and blessed significance do the histories of all the saints of God thereby acquire for us ! May a deep sense then of this mysterious unity and fellowship accompany us to the scene which we are about to contemplate, and enable us to rejoice in the glorious and gracious manifestation vouchsafed to Elijah on Horeb, as an exhibition of kindness, not to him only, but to us also as members with him of the one body in Christ.

1 KINGS xix. 11—13.

"And he said, Go forth and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks, before the Lord ; but the Lord was not in the wind ; and after the wind an earthquake : but the Lord was not in the earthquake : And after the earthquake a fire ; but the Lord was not in the fire : and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave : and, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah ?"

It is a majestic scene, my friends, to which we now draw near in the stillness of devotion. It is a narrative as grand, as deep in meaning, and as rich in consolation, as we anywhere meet with in the lives of the saints of God. May it then disclose to us its depths of wonder, and impress us as strongly as if it had been repeated in our own expe-

rience. We shall consider the event, I. In its historical course. II. In its immediate object.

I. "Go forth," it had been said to Elijah, "and stand upon the mount before the Lord." The prophet hears and obeys. And no sooner is he gone forth, than signs occur which proclaim the approach of the Almighty, and what awful signs ! A constant thrill of terror and of awe passes through the prophet's mind. The first sign is a tremendous storm. Till now, the deepest silence had reigned over the dreary waste. Suddenly all about him is in fearful uproar. What a crashing of the elements on every side ! What a struggle of howling blasts and hollow thunders from the depths of the mountains, as if the four winds had in a moment burst their prison to fight in wild wrath together. Whole forests are swept from their rocky seats as with the besom of destruction. The clouds career over the sky like squadrons rushing to the conflict. The sandy desert rises in curling billows like a raging sea. Deep resounds unto deep with the crash of falling cliffs. The rocks are rent and threaten to sink in ruin. Up every steep and chasm there sounds as the whirling haste and fiery rage of an invisible army hurrying on the foe ; and from every central depth there rise the groans, and shrieks, and murderous din of unearthly combat. Sinai quakes to its summit as of old, and as if the terrors of the law-giving were renewing around it. The prophet stands at the entrance of the cave, and gazes in consternation on the tremendous scene. His soul trembles at the majesty of Jehovah, and is ready to sink under the weight of terror. It is, alas, no sense of peace or nearness to God, with which the awful tumult inspires him ; rather a feeling of distressing distance. "A strong wind went before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind."

And as the storm abates, behold a new and alarming portent ! The earth reels to its lowest depths, and the foundations of the hills are moved ; shock follows after shock ; the solid ground quivers all about him. The pro-

phet feels the quick rise and staggering fall, and hears on every side a mingled rending, and bursting, and shattering of elements, as if the solid globe would fall asunder. The mountains and rocks, which the storm had torn and scattered, are now hurled upon each other by the earthquake. Heights sink and valleys rise; chasms yawn and horrible depths unfold, as if the earth would perish in its own abysses. The prophet looks forth upon the wreck of nature, and feels more than ever the terrible majesty of Him, who but looketh upon the earth and it trembleth. But here, too, there is no trace of a gracious presence or message of peace. The earthquake was only a second herald of the approaching God. It went before the Lord, "but the Lord was not in the earthquake."

And no sooner is the earthquake over, than, wonder upon wonder! a new amazement fills his soul. Jets of fire dart forth on all sides with horrid hissing sound; and in the twinkling of an eye the deepest midnight is turned into lurid and unearthly day. The whole heaven is one sheet of flame, one ocean of fire, that dashes its spiry billows over the mountain-summits, fed by a subterraneous tide from every rent and cavern in the rock, and devours, in the wide waste, tree and bush, and stone, and licks up the water in the springs. It is as if the day of the last conflagration were come, in which heaven and earth shall be cast into the furnace, that the soiled and wasted hull of time may sink in dross, and the holy splendours of a new heaven and a new earth may rise in eternal beauty on the view. Elijah is lost in adoring awe. The flames play harmless about him; but the Lord does not descend to him in the chariot of fire. His heart is still mastered by consternation and dread, and feels nothing of the presence of a reconciled God. The fire went before the Lord; "but the Lord was not in the fire."

The fire dies away; the rolling waves of flame have spent their rage. A deep tranquillity, like the stillness of a sanctuary, settles again over all nature; and it seems as if every hill and dale, nay, the whole earth and skies, lay



in silent homage at the footstool of the eternal Majesty. The very mountains seem to worship ; their silent tops to be lost in adoration. Not a leaf is heard to rustle ; the firmament is once more clear and cloudless, and the stars of God look down bright and peaceful from their calm heights ; and lo ! “ a still small voice,” or “ the voice of a gentle whisper,” falls on the prophet’s ear, and the Lord is there ; Elijah feels it, and his heart now sinks in deeper awe ; but his dread is gone. He wraps his face in his mantle, goes forth in adoring wonder, and stands at the entrance of the cave.

II. If now we enquire into the peculiar signification and intention of the Divine manifestation at Horeb, we cannot, I think, remain long in doubt respecting it. It is evident that the Lord meant thereby to lead the prophet out of a variety of doubts and anxieties in which he had lost himself. One outward mystery had followed another ; one inward perplexity had complicated another. He had lost his clue to the windings of the labyrinth, in the sudden turn which the affairs of God’s kingdom had taken in Israel. In God’s name, and with his commission, he had forsaken his native mountains, and gone to Samaria to recal the backsliding people to the faith of their fathers. The means for such a work had been placed in his hand by God himself. It had been given him to shut heaven, and to open it again ; to bring distress upon the land, and to remove it. He had done signs and wonders, such as had not been wrought in Israel for centuries, and had laboured as abundantly as any saint before him. From such exertions he had expected, as was natural enough, corresponding results ; and had hoped for nothing less than a penitent return of all Israel to their allegiance to Jehovah. The fervent man of God, however, was mistaken. Not only were his hopes not realized ; they were utterly frustrated. In the very moment when he had expected to lead back the re-converted people to the altar of the living God, with psalms and hymns of rejoicing, he sees

the sword uplifted to slay him, and all his labour appears in vain. All this was too mysterious for him; and he could not reconcile it with his views of the faithfulness of God.

This doubting state of mind had attained its height at Horeb, and had broken forth in a complaint, not only against the people, but virtually against the Lord himself; when the majestic signs and wonders, we have been considering, passed before him, and produced those effects which have been already described. The wind, the earthquake, and the fire, produced only an awful sense of distance; and the still small voice, on the contrary, the liveliest emotions of joy and sense of communion with God. In these signs, and their effects, I apprehend, we are to behold a Divine lesson given to the prophet respecting the nature and working of his own past prophetic labours, and a glorious answer to all the complaints, doubts, and fears to which he had given way.

The scenes of terror which he had witnessed were signs of his own prophetic teaching and activity, which had been wrapped in the awful grandeur of Divine majesty, and been characterised more by the spirit of the law, than of the gospel. The storm was but an echo of his own words of thunder in reproving sin, with which he had struck the consciences of the people of Israel; the earthquake represented the shaking of plagues and judgments over the land; the fire reminded him of the flames of Carmel, and of the bloody execution of which it had been the signal. In this way, it had fallen upon Elijah to appear as another Moses, with the burning torch of the law, a herald of that God, who will not be mocked. But in his zeal our prophet had forgotten, that in looking for reformation from these measures, he was expecting consequences which never can attend the ministration of the law, but must always be coupled with the still small voice of the gospel. What had he expected? Nothing less than the penitent return of all Israel to the God of their fathers. In this hope he went too far. He was not justified in cherishing these expectations, and it was this which was to

be brought to his mind in an impressive manner on Horeb. He there learned that the display of mere power and majesty, however overwhelming, if their burning terrors are not tempered by grace, may indeed inspire the sinner with anxiety and alarm, but cannot truly humble or convert him. He was to become deeply conscious, that the display of infinite holiness, unassociated with the kindness and love of God our Saviour, can make the soul tremble and shrink back in despair, but cannot move it to penitential confession, or confiding submission to the Lord. Now he had experienced in his own heart that grace alone can really soften, and melt, and convert the soul; and that the blessed results, which he had ignorantly expected from the law, could only be produced by the loving-kindness and mercy of Jehovah.

But though thus taught the error of his past hopes, he was at the same time led to the pleasing conclusion that his labour would not be in vain in the Lord; and, that, after the storm, the earthquake, and the fire, the Lord would come, also in due time, with the still small voice, which the hearts of men would then be unable to resist, and to which the stubborn would gladly yield; and with what delight must Elijah have read in these events this great promise, and embraced it! And his labour, too, was not to be a lost labour. How welcome the assurance! As the signs of power and terror on Horeb had not passed over his own soul without trace of good, but had prepared it for the genial breath of the still small voice, and heightened the melting power of the contrast, so the Lord would thereby have him understand, that the mind of the people had been made alive by terror to the coming manifestation of grace. He was thus taught to regard his prophetic office as designed to break up by the plough the hardened soil of apostacy; to present the forgotten law, in all its majesty and strictness, before the minds of a backsliding people; to awaken the sleepers and terrify the secure with the thunders of the law, and thereby to excite in them a longing after the gospel, a hungering and thirsting

after " grace reigning through righteousness, unto eternal life."

Thus Elijah has received a satisfactory solution to all his difficulties; and in how wonderful and divine a manner. In this one divine act the Lord has fully justified his own dealings towards the prophet,—cleared up all the mysteries of his life,—dispelled all his anxieties,—rebuked all his doubts,—and, at one and the same time, gloriously vindicated his own honour, and gently taught the prophet his own mistakes, so that he is ready to bow in the deepest humility, and to utter the confession, " Thou, Lord, art righteous, but unto me belongeth confusion of face." And though Elijah soon after repeated the complaint, it was in a totally different spirit. It then proceeded from a contrite and humbled frame of mind. The gloomy vexation, the fretting temper, the inward strife and murmuring, had all disappeared. The jarring discords of his agitated spirit had melted into the purest harmony.

Thus, my friends, I have endeavoured to give you some explanation of the immediate design of the mysterious events on Horeb. The reason why so many evangelical expositors have left it no better than a riddle, arises from their excessive, or let me rather say, improper ideas of the sanctity of the prophet. They saw in him a being who was no longer liable to human errors, and who could never be drawn aside from the path of divine simplicity, and of stedfast, child-like, unreserved submission to his Lord. But Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are; he was not free, any more than others, of what we all inherit from Adam; and we must seek the key to the wonderful manifestation on Horeb, not in the prophet's perfection, but in his infirmity. Yet, how does it exalt our ideas, after all, of the greatness of his devoted spirit, that for his reproof and instruction, heaven and earth were moved, the rocks rent, the mountains overthrown; and how must the mighty God have loved him, to have deemed him a worthy object of such condescension!

This narrative enables us to answer a question which

has been sometimes proposed, Why is Elijah styled a prophet, while, in his whole history, there 'appears no trace of the gospel or future Messiah? We deny the assertion. There is here a trace of the gospel of life; nay, more than a trace. The office of our prophet was not, indeed, that of an *evangelist*, seeing that he was appointed to maintain the dispensation of Moses; but the sun of the gospel had risen upon his own heart; and we have seen from the effects of "the still small voice," what healing there was under its wings. I am persuaded, that could he have unbosomed himself more fully, he would have been one of the most blessed heralds of mercy to the ancient church, and his speech would have dropped as the rain, and distilled as the dew. But the people, among whom his lot was cast, were not yet ripe for the full disclosure of grace, and hence his high mission required him to treasure up the jewel of his faith almost in the secrecy of his own heart, and to hide the office of the evangelist under the rough garment of a herald of the law.

Here, for a season, we leave the top of Horeb, and, I trust, not without refreshment and blessing. May the Lord, who is the great, and gracious, and faithful God, visit us all with the still small voice, and may our whole life be like the standing of Elijah before Him with his face wrapped in his mantle!

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#### V.—RENEWED MISSION.

One of the most affecting and consolatory of the Old Testament histories is that which relates the wonderful preservation of the infant Moses, *Exod. ii. 1—10*. Lo, at the bank of the Nile, there floats among the reeds a small ark made of bulrushes, and carefully coated over with slime and pitch, that the water might not enter in; for a treasure, indeed, lies concealed in it, an infant, beautiful before the Lord, and dear and precious beyond all else to his mother; she has, therefore, thus secured it to try if the babe in its floating cradle may not escape the cruel

sentence which Pharaoh has pronounced on all the newborn males of Israel. A mother's love has prepared the infant's couch with many silent tears; and while it lies there rocked by the winds and waters, the sisterly love of Miriam keeps her within sight of it to watch its fate. The providence of God brings Pharaoh's daughter to the banks of the river, she descries the ark floating among the reeds, and sends one of her maids to fetch it. "And when she had opened it, she saw the child; and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children." Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee, and she said, Go." And the maid went and called the child's mother, and Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, "Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages." Thus were child and mother once more restored to each other, "and they nursed the child."

The spiritual comfort which may be derived from this narrative is great. As many of us, my friends, as belong to Christ are hidden as it were in an ark, which no sword of oppressor can penetrate, or flood of persecution submerge. This ark is his heart, his love. But many of us are like the infant Moses, who knew not how secure he was, and wept. Many of us are, no doubt, left to float on the waves of trouble amid slimy reeds, where the winds sigh, and the crocodile moans, and the viper hisses, and the dark stream whirls its eddies; and hence we give way to trembling, and our eyes fill with tears. But weep not, beloved brethren, remember who watches over you. A greater than mother's love has placed thee there for thy good, and woven thine ark of safety, and set a watch over thee, though thou seest it not. If thou perish, the eternal love of God must perish also; for into that ark hast thou been received, and no hand can open it to pluck thee away. Nor shalt thou float upon the waters for ever. Be of good cheer; though there are nothing but darkness

and death before thee, as before the infant Moses, the love of God stands already by the brink of the stream, and is hastening to draw thee forth from its reedy waves, and to nurse and train thee in thy true eternal home. The sacred narrative, which we are this day to consider, conspires with that of Moses in teaching us to calm our fears and forget our sorrows.

1 KINGS xix. 13—17.

“ And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave : and, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah ? And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts : because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword ; and I, even I only, am left ; and they seek my life to take it away. And the Lord said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus ; and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria ; and Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel ; and Elisha the son of Shaphat, of Abel-meholah, shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay ; and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay.”

The passage just read presents, at first sight, much that is strange in connexion with the great events that formed the subject of the preceding lecture. Who would have expected that the prophet would renew his former complaint, or that the Lord should dismiss him with commissions and disclosures like these ? It needs, however, only a closer consideration of the matter to unravel and elucidate everything that is thus perplexed and obscure.

Let us, I. Take a hasty practical retrospect of the manifestation on Horeb ; II. Attend to the prophet's complaint ; and, III. Enquire into the nature of the commissions with which the Lord dismisses him.

I. The majestic scene of wonders on Horeb has already passed before our eyes, and its deep meaning has been in some measure disclosed. It displayed the striking contrast of the spirit of the Old Testament dispensation as a schoolmaster unto Christ, and of the New Testament dis-

pensation as the reign of grace. Thus we see the grand occurrence taking place, not for Elijah's sake only, but for ours also ; and we must not leave it without a glance at its rich practical import.

The Lord comes to all, to whom he will reveal himself in grace, more or less, as he came to Elijah at Horeb. Is your own experience quite different? Do you know nothing of the storm which he sends before him, as it were, to rend the mountains ; of an earthquake, that shakes the depths of the soul, and casts down its high imaginations ; of a fire of terror and wasting anxiety that precedes the approach of the Lord of glory? Are your rocks still unbroken? Have your heights not yet been cast down, and the treacherous ground of self-righteousness been swept from beneath your feet? And yet you imagine that you have already heard the still small voice of grace. Ah, you are, perhaps, not aware that Satan can "transform himself into an angel of light," and counterfeit the sounds of the gospel of peace. Have you not learned that this deceiver can speak a false assurance of forgiveness to the soul, and out of the very promises of the gospel wreathen snares of death ; and that, of all his captives, he least fears the escape of those who are caught by the wiles of a false security of eternal life? O tremble at the artifices of the old serpent, and bethink you, that the comforter who can quiet your conscience without mortifying your flesh is not the Spirit of the Lord, but the spirit of darkness. For Jesus draws not nigh with his still small voice till every high thing that exalts itself against him is made low, and the old spirit of self-righteousness has received a mortal wound.

Brethren, "Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life," and "many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able." *Seeking* is not sufficient here ; there must be *striving*. The new creation arises upon the ruins of the old and corrupt nature. Wherever grace builds, it first pulls down ; and it is by bringing to nought things that are, that God makes of his people what they



by nature are not. An interesting anecdote will illustrate this.

There was, some few years ago, a very gifted preacher not far from this place, who had for several years preached with great earnestness and success the doctrine of the Cross; and who, as might have been expected, had not failed to raise up violent opposition. One of his opponents, a man of much education and travel, had, out of hatred to the truth, long given up the practice of attending church, when one Sabbath morning it occurred to him to go and hear the gloomy man once more, to see whether his preaching might be more tolerable to him than it was before. He went: and that morning the preacher was discoursing of the "narrow way," which he made no narrower, but also no broader than the word of God makes it. "A new creature in Christ or eternal condemnation" was the burden of his sermon; and "he spoke with authority and not as the scribes." During the sermon the question forced itself on this hearer's conscience, "How is this after all? Does the man declare the real truth? If he does, what must be the inevitable consequence? And if it is mere words and fables, surely these barbarous ministers should be driven from their pulpits in disgrace for alarming the consciences of men with the inventions of priestcraft." This thought took such a hold of him, that it followed him home, and stuck to him amid his hours of business and amusement. It became from day to day more and more penetrating, more and more troublesome, and threatened at last to embitter every joy of his life; till it brought him to the resolution of going directly to the preacher himself, and asking him on his conscience if he were really convinced of the truth of that which he had lately preached. He carried his purpose into effect, and went to the preacher. "Sir," said he, to him, with visible emotion and great earnestness, "I was one of your hearers the other day, when you spoke of the only way of salvation. I confess to you, you have disturbed my peace of mind, and I cannot refrain from asking you solemnly before God and your own

conscience, if you can stand by your assertions, or if you have distressed your hearers with an unfounded alarm." The preacher not a little surprised at this address, replied with strong decision, that what he had spoken was the word of God, and hence infallible truth. "If this be so," returned the visitor with manifest consternation, "what will become of us?" His last word *us* startles the preacher; but he masters his confusion, and begins to explain the plan of salvation to the inquirer, and exhorts him to repent and believe. But the latter, as though he had not heard one syllable of all that the preacher had said, interrupts him in the midst of it, and repeats with increasing agitation the anxious exclamation, "If this be true, Sir, I beseech you, what are we to do?" Terrified, the preacher staggers back. *We*, thinks he, what means this *we*? and striving in vain to suppress and conceal his growing uneasiness and embarrassment he falls anew to the work of expounding and exhortation. The visitor's eyes filled with tears; he smote his hands together like one in despair, and cried out in accents that might have moved the heart of a stone, "Alas! Sir, if this be true, it is all over with us, and we are undone for ever." The preacher stood pale, trembling, and speechless; then with a look of unspeakable confusion, with downcast eyes and convulsive sobbings, he seized his visitor by the hand, and exclaimed, "Friend, down on your knees; let us pray and cry for mercy." They knelt together and prayed; and the visitor hastily took his leave. The preacher shut himself up in his closet. Next Sunday, word was sent that the minister was unwell, and could not preach. The Sunday after, it was the same. On the third Sunday he made his appearance before his congregation, worn with his inward conflict and pale, but his eyes beaming with joy; and commenced his discourse with the surprising and affecting declaration, that he had now, for the first time, passed through the strait gate. You will ask, what had occurred to him in his chamber during the weeks of his seclusion. A storm passed over

before him, but the Lord was not in the storm ; an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake ; a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. Then came a still small voice ; on which the man wrapped his face in his mantle, and from that time knew what was the gospel, and what was grace.

No sooner did the Lord approach the prophet in the still small voice, than he wrapped his face in his mantle. This is a striking emblem of the inward temper of all God's children. They walk before the Lord wrapped in the mantle of humility. The law fills them with alarm ; the knowledge of sin casts them on the ground ; but the holy shame, the deep and silent contrition, which is so dear in God's sight, begins to be felt only when the Lord has revealed himself in the soft whisper of grace. " Behold," it is said in Ezekiel xvi. 62, 63, " I will establish my covenant with thee ; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord : that thou mayest remember and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God." Yes, when such a whisper of the most unmerited mercy breathes upon us, our lofty looks are brought down, our mouth is shut, we blush and are ashamed to lift up our face. But it is a shame without distress ; a trembling without servile fear ; a humiliation replete with love and blessedness. O how well-pleasing is it to the Lord ! We have now, my brethren, seen the prophet in many situations. We have seen him clothed with strength and boldness, contending like a lion with God's enemies ; we have seen him in the tempest, with undaunted front, stand like a rock of the sea, unmoved by the winds and waves. But, methinks, he never appeared more noble and amiable, than here on Horeb ; when, at the still small voice of Divine mercy, he bowed his mighty spirit, and trembling with confusion and delight, wrapped his face in his mantle.

II. The prophet now went forth and stood at the entering in of the cave, "And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?" This question, thus repeated, seemed to direct him back to the scene of his public activity. We should have supposed that, after his extraordinary experiences, such a direction would now have been eagerly welcomed, and that the prophet would have hastened back with winged feet to the midst of Israel. But, instead of this, he breaks out, to our no small astonishment, with his old complaint, as if the wonders that had passed before him had been forgotten. "I have been very jealous," he answered, "for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, and thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I, only am left; and they seek my life to take it away."

Let us explain the mystery, my friends, at once. The *words* of the complaint are the same, but not its *spirit*. It is now purified from all remains of murmuring and natural bitterness, and appears as the involuntary cry of poor, infirm, human hearts, even of God's children, when the exercise of strong faith is called for. He must, by this time, have been persuaded that his labours in Samaria had not been in vain; but he could not utter the confession, "Lord, I believe," without the depressing addition, "Help thou mine unbelief." Of the certainty, in general, of the approaching reformation, he could not doubt; but when he came to the *time when*, and the *manner how* it should be effected, he became entangled amid his former difficulties, and could not refrain from pouring out his complaint as before.

Believing in darkness, on God's bare word, where sight is impossible, or rather runs counter to the demands of faith, is certainly a great and glorious thing, by which God is highly honoured; and would that this fruit of the Lord's planting were more abundant in his vineyard! But alas! even where faith is genuine, it appears most frequently in a state of conflict, and seldom triumphant or

perfected. You find yourself, for example, in precarious circumstances; the cares of life and domestic embarrassments weigh you down; you can see no relief from the burden; all human help has vanished. You now cast your view over the promises of God. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee; fear not, I am with thee. Behold, I have graven thee on the palms of my hands." You know that he who thus speaks to you is the God of truth. You take the word as a staff in your hand; you hope against hope; you believe in the dark. This is believing on the word of God. But is our faith generally of this stamp? Is not our faith more frequently like a bark on a stormy sea, which only escapes a thousand shipwrecks by the good hand of God upon it? Sometimes a gleam of hope may visit us, and we exclaim, "The Lord will do all things well;" but we soon pass again under the cloud, and ask in despondency, "But how will it be performed?" No sooner have we ventured the request, "Lord, let me come to thee on the sea;" than, appalled by the winds and waves, we cry out, "Lord save me, I perish." Thus our hearts are in perpetual fluctuation, and our faith engaged in a constant wrestling with doubt. There are, indeed, bright and noble exceptions—saints who are strong in faith, giving glory to God; and, assuredly, our unbelief is not more our misfortune than our sin. But it is well to know the weakness of our frame, to be on our guard against "the evil heart of unbelief," and to watch and pray that we enter not into temptation.

III. To return to our narrative. Elijah is told to depart in peace. "Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus." He receives from the Lord a threefold commission, and with it strength to his faith, and provision for his journey. "When thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria." This is the reply to Elijah's first complaint. "The children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant." "I will send thee a rod of correction," was the Divine answer; "Hazael, the servant of the Syrian king,

shall fulfil all my purposes of chastisement. Go, anoint him to be king over Syria." Hazael afterwards became king, and a severe scourge to the children of Israel. "He burnt their fortified cities, slew their young men, dashed their children in pieces, ripped up their women with child." He served the Lord as the staff of his indignation, and was one of the storms that went before him, to break the rocks and rend the mountains; and when he had finished his work, he was laid aside. The Lord can thus make use of the wicked at one time as vessels of wrath for pouring out his indignation upon those who have not known him, at another, as shepherds' dogs, that keep his flock together, and bring back the wandering sheep.

My brethren, who can tell what is yet in store for our own vale, our own congregation, our own churches? We are at present under Divine forbearance; but can any one tell how long this will last? We cannot recount all the mercy which the God of all grace has already shewed us, and shews us still from day to day. Yet how few are there who really thank God for his long-suffering kindness, and shew their gratitude by keeping his commandments? Suppose the Lord were suddenly to remove all his true children out of the midst of us, and leave the impenitent alone behind,—would our population suffer a very perceptible decrease? Or is it not the case with ourselves, as everywhere else, that the seed of Jacob among the Canaanites is but as a drop in the ocean, and like the little stars which in a stormy night twinkle only here and there among the black and gathering clouds? Are not a great part of our people dead, alas! sealed in death, in some measure, by the word of life? This is truly awful! For years together have they brought their dead souls with them to the house of God; and it seems as if the quickening atmosphere of gospel truth into which they have entered had acted on them only to harden and to petrify them. A great part of our people are weary of the simple truth, and listless in their hearing; the incessant theme of Jesus and his Cross is become distasteful to them. No thunder

of the law can now awake them, no sweet note of mercy and promise can touch a cord of sensibility in their deadened hearts. We knock, but the bolts of the heart are not withdrawn : we shoot, but the arrow of conviction recoils from the seared conscience. Many of our people are lukewarm, neither for nor against, neither cold nor hot ; they know Christ in word, but their heart remains without fire of love to him ; and what awaits them but to be rejected by the Saviour with abhorrence ? Many halt between two opinions ; they praise Christ and the world in one breath ; they bow before the Lord and Baal in the same act of worship. Their heart is set on two incompatible things, to be merry with the children of the world and to be blessed with the children of God ; they wish to possess Christ, but will not for his sake part with the world. Behold, my friends, the majority of our countrymen ; they fall almost all into one or other of these classes, whether high or low, rich or poor. What shall be the end of these things ? May the Lord have mercy upon us ! For if matters go on in this way, what can be prophesied of us but evil ? The patience of God has its limits, and we may be verging on them. Who can tell but that soon it may be said to some mighty angel, " Go now and appoint this or that man for a Hazeel ; and let this deceiver or that son of lies be made shepherd over such and such a flock ? " Who knows whether the preachers who now stand in your pulpits are not the last who may proclaim to this ungrateful generation the message of peace, and whether the traitors are not already training in the school of Satan, who only wait for our departure to take possession of our places, with the torch of the false prophet lighted from the bottomless pit in their hand ? Perhaps in a few years the vision among you may cease, the people be wasted and scattered, the Lord's flock all taken away, and his fire extinguished to the last spark. And when the righteous are taken out of the land, and no more holy hands are lifted up in intercession, its pillars become rotten, its walls unstable, its foundation slippery and insecure, and it sinks in vice and

ruin. "O that thou hadst known, even thou, in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace!" Yet forty years, and perhaps our Nineveh shall be overthrown, "and where the carcase is the eagles will be gathered together." Arise, then, and put on sackcloth and ashes. Let each turn himself from the evil of his way, and the iniquity of his hands. Who can tell, if the Lord will not turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?

Elijah was to anoint Hazael, a stranger, to be king over Syria, that he might become a scourge to Israel. This was his first commission. And the second was, to anoint Jehu, the son of Nimshi, to be king over Israel. This was the answer to the second complaint of the prophet. "They have thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets." As if the Lord had said, "I will vindicate my own glory; the house of Ahab shall be extirpated, and Jehu shall lay the axe to its roots." And so it came to pass. Jehu was the man that rooted out the house of Ahab from the ground, so that neither stump nor stalk was left. He caused Jezebel to be thrown from the window of her palace, and suffered her carcase to be eaten up of dogs in the streets. He slew the seventy sons of Ahab in one day; caused their heads to be displayed in two heaps at the gates of Jezreel; destroyed the priests of Baal in their own temple; cast its holy furniture into the flames; and made an end of the heathen worship of Sidon in Israel.

Recent times have afforded examples of similar judgments to what were poured out on the house of Ahab. Even in our own days, there is no want of instances of the rooting out of whole families, because they hardened their hearts against the Lord, and bitterly persecuted his children and servants. Though, for a season, they may flourish like a green bay-tree, and may have power granted them to gratify their enmity against the unoffending flock of God, and its pastors; suddenly, the scene is reversed, and He, who puts on jealousy like a garment, takes upon himself the office of Jehu, and bathes the sword of vengeance



in heaven. Their glory sinks into the depths of ignominy, and there is no one found who can arrest the rapidly descending wheel. One fails in business, and sinks into beggary with his whole house; another is given up to the will of his flesh, and sinks miserably in the filth of sin. One must flee away bearing the brand of the law; another is brought by abandoned children with sorrow to the grave. One is smitten with madness; another is given over to a reprobate mind, and, perhaps, in a fit of despair, with impious right hand destroys himself. Ah, the building of pride creaks to its very foundations; and where the Lord breaks down, there is no building up; the fire of his anger burns even unto hell! An evil impenitent death, the awful close of temporal judgments, is but the first in a new series of terrors which no grave can close. The castaway go with Judas to their place, and their names are named no more on earth, or only with abhorrence; their place on earth is forgotten, or shunned as the seat of an everlasting curse. Has any thing of this kind ever happened among us? Answer this question for yourselves, my friends. One thing at least I know, that many a house of Ahab still exists among us, that, if impenitent, cannot escape its fate, but must pay the penalty to Divine justice of its fierce scorn and hatred of Christ and his people. "Who-soever shall fall on this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall it will grind him to powder."

The third commission given to Elijah must have been to him the most pleasing of all. It contained the answer to his third complaint, "I, even I, only am left, and they seek my life to take it away." It was as if the Lord had said to him, "Be not cast down, O Elijah, thou art not the only one that is left; and wert thou the only prophet on the field of battle, thinkest thou not that I raise up prophets when I need them." "Go and anoint Elisha the son of Shaphat, of Abel-meholah, to be prophet in thy room. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay; and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay."

Thus a storm is announced against backsliding Israel in the person of Hazael; an earthquake in that of Jehu; and a fire in that of Elisha, that should declare at once the wrath and the love of Jehovah. Elijah now sees that the Keeper of Israel has not forsaken his vineyard; and this strengthens his faith; this nerves him in soul and body; and when he soon afterwards hears from the Lord's mouth the surprising intelligence that there remained still 7000 in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal, the gloomy clouds are entirely scattered from his mind, and with his heart full of the prospect of the glory of God, he cannot longer delay to set out on his return through the wilderness.

My brethren, if a sword of the Lord is to pass through this congregation, and a sword will surely come, O, may it not be the sword of Hazael and of Jehu, but the sword of Elisha, the two-edged sword of the Spirit, which is the word of the living God. This good sword, with which he takes the prey from the mighty, may the Lord prosper more and more, that it may better hew its way among us, and pierce, and sever, and penetrate, as it has never done before. May it cast down the proud into the dust; drive the secure out of their refuges of lies; and so wound the self-righteous and maim the whole, that none but Jesus may be able to heal them! Blessed wounds! salutary disasters! The strokes of this sword divide the living from the dead; and by its scars thou mayst distinguish the children of God!

“Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most Mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty; and in thy majesty ride prosperously, because of truth, and meekness, and righteousness; and by thine arrows let the people fall under thee.” Psal. xlv. 3—5. “And may the people which are left of the sword find grace in the wilderness; even Israel, when thou goest to cause him rest.” Amen. Jer. xxxi. 2.

## VI.—THE HIDDEN CHURCH.

“ I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people,” saith the Lord by the prophet Isaiah, lxx. 19. These words open to us a view into the paternal love of God, which ought to draw our hearts up towards himself. We behold here the close relation which subsists between God and his chosen people ; and see that we entertain, respecting it, ideas far too mean, if we conceive of it as the relation of a mighty monarch and his pardoned criminal subjects, or of a condescending master and his unprofitable servants. It is only a faint glimpse of the love of God which is afforded us, when it is said that we are objects of his sparing and pardoning mercy. We are incomparably more than this. The Lord *rejoices* over his people. He delighteth in them that fear him and trust in his mercy. He beholds them not as they are in themselves, but as they appear in the glorious righteousness and implanted holiness of their Surety. In that holiness he sees something that wears the image of his Son, and shines with the brightness of his own glory. For the regenerate are conformed to the express image of the Divine person.

A figure here occurs to me, which has been used by a certain writer somewhere, which is so striking, and deep, and beautiful, that I cannot deny myself the pleasure of repeating it for your edification. The glorious sun in the heavens, as you know, enlightens, warms, and fructifies all nature. Suppose now, that this all-enlightening, all-reviving, all-fructifying sun, were a rational being, and could watch all the effects of his influence ; it would then behold its own image in every sea, in every lake, in every river, in every brook, nay, it would even see itself reflected in the loftiest mountains of ice ; and would it not, in the abundance of its joy, at this glorious radiance, forgetting itself, embrace all these seas, lakes, and rivers, nay, the very glaciers, in its arms, and delight in them ? Thus Jesus Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, beholds his own

image and Divine work in every renewed soul, as in a mirror; hence, seeming to forget himself in the abundance of his joy, he could condescend to wash the feet of his disciples, and exclaim over the Syrophenician woman in profound satisfaction, "O woman, great is thy faith." Thus, too, the eternal Father beholds in his children the beauty of his Son Christ Jesus, as the brightness of his own glory, with an adorable complacency, which we want words to express. He embraces them in the arms of his love; if the image of the Son be but reflected in their hearts, however chill and cold they be, he turns not away the reviving beams of his affection.

Happy are the people that are in such a case; "Yea, blessed are the people that have the Lord for their God." We are to witness the discovery of a portion of them this day, where we would little have thought to find them. We are to contemplate the hidden church.

#### 1 KINGS xix. 18-

"Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him."

These words form the conclusion of the address of Jehovah to Elijah at Horeb. After the announcement of the heavy judgments which were to come upon degenerate Israel, by the hands of Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha, this delightful communication follows like the still small voice. The last shade of gloom must now have been dispelled, and the full day of peace and joy restored to the prophet's mind.

The announcement made to the prophet may lead us, I. To remark that God has ever a Hidden Church. II. To attend to the discovery of it sometimes made. III. To rejoice in the promises given to it.

I. "O Lord, thy name is forgotten, and the pillars of thy temple are shaking. I, even I, only am left, and they seek my life to take it away." Such were Elijah's com-

plaints, and how could he help their utterance ; since the age was indeed evil, and the days of Noah seemed to be restored. All was dark, dead, ruined, and desolate ; and the kingdom of God, with the exception of a few persecuted adherents of it, driven from the earth. It must have wounded Elijah to the very heart. For many a day had he dwelt on the painful topic, and could find no lightening of its darkness ; when all at once he hears from the mouth of the Omniscient One the unspeakably astonishing tidings that the faithful were not as he had gloomily imagined, only one here and one there ; but that a whole body, a great multitude, 7000 in number, yet remained, who had not bowed the knee to Baal, nor kissed him. How deeply affected must the prophet have been by this disclosure. Gladly would he have recalled the rash words, “ I, even I, only am left alone.” How must he have been ashamed of his unbelief ; but with a shame that merged in a deeper joy that the kingdom of God was still so gloriously upheld. How eagerly must he have longed to commence his return to the blessed labour of farther extending it !

And what could be more delightful, my brethren, than for us in the present day to be surprised by a similar piece of intelligence ? Our age, no doubt, is a great deal better than Elijah’s was ; but every one must admit that there is much that is no better than outward show. Yet, if all were Divine life which appears in the form of real godliness ; if all the preachers who, in recent times, have returned to the evangelical strain preached the truth in the Holy Ghost, and in supreme devotion to the crucified Saviour ; if all the crowds that flock to the house of God were really saying in their hearts, “ Come, let us return to the Lord,” and were following a better lead than that of fashion and custom ; if all the great ones of the earth, who are striving to lead back the people to the faith of their fathers, had, indeed, first taken the oath of allegiance to Him by whom kings reign and princes decree justice, and resolved to walk in the steps of the man after

God's own heart ; if the thousands that seek, by Bible and Missionary Societies, the drawing of all nations into the ark of safety had first entered it themselves ; nay, if only those whom we see in the present day regularly attending meetings for prayer and religious edification were all entitled to be reckoned as true followers of the Lamb ; if we could suppose all this, the present state of our world would not be quite so bad, however much might yet remain to be corrected. But what avails it to blind our eyes to the melancholy truth ! How deceitful are the fairest appearances, and how sadly does that which looked large and shone brightly in the distance shrivel up and fade on a nearer inspection, even where it does not, as is too often the case, vanish like a meteor of the night, and leave no trace behind ! But suppose we even granted that all who, in our days, have the form of godliness were acquainted with its power, how small would be the proportion of such believers, even in so-called Christian countries, to those who stand forth manifestly in the eyes of all as rejectors of the salvation of the Bible ? The prevailing spirit of our times is still, as formerly, a spirit of infidelity and apostacy ; a spirit of the shallowest rationalism and the blindest presumption ; a spirit of opposition to the Word of God, and of arrogant self-reliance in the knowledge of good and evil ; a spirit of the most unbounded idolatry, of mere natural reason, and the most insolent depreciation of the revealed mysteries of the Bible. Among the great mass of nominal Christians, not only of the learned sort, but also of the illiterate, it has long been a settled point, that the doctrine of human depravity is a gloomy fancy, and that salvation by the blood and righteousness of Christ is an antiquated delusion. It is assumed as an incontrovertible dictate of reason, that the miserable rubbish of external righteousness, the precious store of pride and selfishness, is more than sufficient to satisfy the God of justice, and that the provision of a Divine Mediator is a quite needless expedient. Many have long been agreed that the dogmas of a few conceited witlings of philosophers are far more

to be trusted than the truth of God, as delivered by Him who is the Light of the world; and that the faith of a Paul, a Peter, and a John, is something so antiquated, absurd, mystical, and unworthy of a cultivated mind, that it ought not merely to be contemptuously rejected, but zealously opposed, persecuted, and, if possible, rooted out by force. Such is the prevailing spirit of our modern christendom, which is at one time tricked out and disguised in the forms and language of Christian truth, and at another walks forth in the unblushing hardihood of naked infidelity. The poison circulates in every quarter, and amid all classes and ranks in life, and is sucked in by our children even with their mother's milk. Millions of men, baptised in the name of Christ, lie at the feet of this shameless spirit of lies. Travel through the country, and you will hear its noisy voice at every public table; mix in company, and it will discover itself in almost every conversation; go from one church to another, and in most you will find this spirit of seduction in the preacher and expositor; cast a glance over many of our modern hymn-books and catechisms, and instead of the Spirit of God, this spirit of darkness, in the mask of religion, will confront you; yea, and in our schools too, there are everywhere altars of Moloch, where our children are sacrificed to this demon. Yes, my brethren, a review of the whole Christian world in the present day is enough to make every pious spirit among us shudder. The time is dark and evil; the spirit of antichrist is in the world to a degree in which it seldom was before; and it is almost time to join in the complaint of the psalmist, "Help, Lord! for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from the children of men." Psal. xii. 1.

Surely, then, many think far too favourably of the present times, which are in truth no other than times of the most mournful degeneracy. But do not others think far too gloomily of them? Doubtless they do, at least we would fain believe so; and an experience like that of Elijah, which we have now before us, cannot but confirm us

in this belief. Assuredly the Lord has in this world, besides the saints with whom we are acquainted, a hidden seed, whom we never know; and many a land and city would have been long ago made like Sodom and Gomorrah, had not the small remnant of righteous persons in them averted the lightning of the divine displeasure. "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation," for, behold, "the kingdom of God is within you." We do not sufficiently keep this in mind, even as Elijah did not, and thereby we often unwarrantably narrow the boundaries of this kingdom.

It is not infrequently the case, my brethren, that we measure the temple of God with a very incorrect measuring line, and therefore err greatly in regard to its breadth and extent. It is, for example, commonly taken for granted that where there are no enlightened preachers there can be no true Christians. But do we not remember the promise of God, that where the shepherds are unfaithful he will take charge of the flock himself; and has he ever made the regeneration of his elect entirely dependant on human instrumentality? Lo, in the midst of the desert, he often plants with his own hand the loveliest roses; and in the wildest brakes, away from the haunts of men, he often wakes for us the sweetest notes of the nightingale.

We are so apt to think, too, that where nothing is heard of awakenings no awakenings take place. But must there always be a storm of wind when it rains, and cannot children be born to the Lord like dew from the womb of the morning, silently and secretly, before day-break, and when men are yet asleep? Again, we take it for granted that where we hear nothing of opposition there can be no decided Christians. Certainly the words still hold good, "I am not come to send peace on the earth, but a sword;" this is the general rule. Still there may be Christians who, though free from the fear of man, pursue so quiet, retired, and gentle a course that they do not provoke the enmity of the children of the world; and if the Lord say to Laban, "Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad," can Laban act otherwise? We farther take it for



granted that in certain circumstances and situations, as, for example, in an infidel and worldly-minded court, a child of God cannot possibly be found. But do we not see from the example of a Joseph, an Obadiah, and a Daniel, that this may very well happen? And Obadiah, too, seems to have possessed the confidence and esteem of so bad a man as Ahab.

The state of Christianity is not infrequently estimated by the religious meetings which are held in any place, and by the number of those who attend them. But is this always a right ground of judgment? Is it not possible that in a district where no such meetings are held many true saints of God may still be found, who are restrained from coming together only by reserve and timidity—and both we know can exist even in true believers—and who are obliged to preserve secrecy like those in Elijah's days? And is it not a part of the Lord's guidance of many souls, that they feel themselves directed much more to secret and retired intercourse with their Lord, than to much intercourse with their brethren? Hence, from the fact that there exists in a certain quarter no active feeling in favour of religious institutions, such as Bible and Missionary Societies, we cannot with any certainty draw the conclusion that no lively Christians are there to be found. Perhaps all that is wanting is sufficient information on such subjects, or judicious means to excite interest in them; or, perhaps, these sincere servants of God have so much to do with themselves, so much to engross them in their own spiritual wants and difficulties, that they have not yet found it possible to turn their attention to public efforts of this kind. All this is possible. But where no works of pious writers are sought for and read; where there is no intelligence of the progress of the gospel; no tracts and no sermons, surely we may infer that there is a total want of spiritual life? Oh no, the conclusion is premature. I know some whom you would all acknowledge to be saints were I to name them, who nevertheless read nothing in the world but their Bible and hymn book, and daily wipe

their eyes for joy that in these they have such a treasure, and will tell you that in these they possess a library which in their whole life they will never exhaust, and that they find nothing so beautiful anywhere as in their old Bibles. Who can blame them, or force other books upon them in which, as they truly say, there is nothing so beautiful? And of such persons there may be more than we imagine.

It is not uncommon for us also to make the number of the faithful smaller than it is by defining too arbitrarily and narrowly the marks of a state of grace. We presume, for example, to prescribe to the Holy Spirit, who is free, as the wind bloweth where it listeth, a certain fixed course which he must follow in the conversion of all; and even set up for a standard the history of his work with ourselves in turning us unto the Lord. But who are we, that we should direct the Spirit of the Lord, or be his counsellors to teach him? Eternal Wisdom has chosen our earth for its theatre; and uniformity is not its favourite style, either in the kingdom of nature or of grace; but its great law is variety in unity. Though thou hast had to struggle thy way into the land of promise through the Red Sea of a sudden, violent, and all but desperate agony of repentance, why may not the Spirit have led another by a path of more gentle sadness, that was sweetened from the first by the hope of grace? His repentance is in substance entirely like thine own, only not in form and outward sign. If thou hadst long to sigh and groan ere thy sins were forgiven thee, yet grudge not thy brother his earlier taste of the graciousness of the Lord; and doubt not the soundness of his conversion, which is the fruit of the same Spirit. If thou hast had grace given thee to attain with greater readiness to a blameless walk and conversation, while thy poor brother has day and night to feel the torture "of the thorn in the flesh," and is once and again beaten to the ground by the blows of the messenger of Satan, and can hardly dry the tears of his first repentance, art thou therefore to adjudge him no child of God? If it is given thee to talk to much edification of thy knowledge and experiences in the

spiritual life, must the gift be therefore distributed to all, and shall there be no silent, reserved, and retiring saints of God? And if thou hast within thee a fervent impulse to awaken others, and to labour like an apostle in preaching from the housetops and exhorting in season and out of season, while others shew none of thy urgency, and have neither the gift nor the pressing call within, wilt thou on that account impeach their faith as dead and spurious? How rash would such conclusions be! And yet, my brethren, there is too much amongst us of this hastiness in judging and measuring others by false and self-made standards; and if we but looked more to the chief and essential matter, the contrite heart and the spirit of love to the Saviour, and held fast in unessential things to the great principle, "There are diversities of gifts, but the one Spirit," I doubt not we should reckon many a precious soul in our brotherhood, that we now unjustly cast off from us as not belonging to the body of Christ.

II. Elijah, as we have seen, received an express revelation respecting the faithful in Israel and their number. The Lord unveiled to him the hidden church, and we may easily conceive his astonishment at the unexpected discovery. He had regarded himself as the only light in the darkness of Samaria, and all at once a whole firmament of elect souls sheds its rays on him, which only the clouds of unbelief had before concealed.

It still happens in the present day, to the praise of God's grace, that the church is refreshed with such delightful discoveries. Often where we looked for nothing but briars and thorns, the Lord surprises us by the view of flowers of paradise blooming in the spiritual garden; and where we thought of nothing but Egyptian darkness on every side, it is said to us, in a higher sense than to Abraham, "Look upward and tell the stars, if thou canst number them." Thus lately, in a village in France, the Lord opened up to our sight the cottage of a notorious fortune-teller, and discovered to us, instead of a family of degraded imposters,

a peaceful and happy company of the lambs of Christ's flock, gathered in a short space from the most outcast vice and misery. So likewise there was very recently found, in one of the most dissipated cities in the world, a spiritual plantation of Divine grace, which we should never have looked for in such a moral desert; and yet it had bloomed from year to year in secret, known only to the heavenly Husbandman who had planted and watered it. In another quarter, and you know it well, where the voice of preaching had long been silent, we were lately called upon to witness whole companies of the most sincere and lively children, which the Lord himself had regenerated by his Spirit, without human means, so that the church was constrained to say, "Who hath begotten me these?" and to look upon them as "dew from the womb of the morning." And in another place we unexpectedly were made to see, through the intervention of a pious emperor, three hundred saints, of whom almost no one knew any thing, lately step forth from the prisons of malefactors—three hundred who had not bowed the knee to Baal, who therefore had lain in irons without the emperor's knowledge. Sometimes the Lord leads us—it was a happiness I frequently enjoyed in my former charge—to find, among the rudest and most abandoned crew of sailors, some old mariner who has grown grey amidst the most hardened associates, and, behold! he is steering toward Jerusalem, and his pole-star is the star of Bethlehem; or some rough barge-man or sailor, with the most rugged aspect, who has grown up in the seat of the scorners, and, behold! through his rude exterior glistens the pure gold of genuine piety, and beneath his canvass-jacket beats a heart moored by that anchor which entereth into that within the veil. And again, as has frequently happened to us, we enter a house to preach repentance towards God to some one whom we imagine spiritually dead, and are completely disarmed, O how happily disarmed, by the sweet smile with which we are saluted, and which is reflected from the peace of a soul that has long tasted that the Lord is gracious and known perhaps more

of the depth of Christian experience than ourselves. Such discoveries, my friends, are far more precious than any made by those who dig for gold or sail round the world in quest of novelty; and it is impossible to express how deeply they put to shame the feebleness of our courage, strengthen our faith, and enlarge our hearts, how much more cautious and charitable they teach us to be in our judgments of others, and how much more bright and hopeful they make our view of the world at large. Since I found among yourselves such hidden jewels of faith, of which I formerly knew nothing, my whole flock rises before me in a new light; and, when I make my rounds among you, I feel like one who is passing with excited hopes through the rich shaft of a mine, where one stroke of the hammer to the right or to the left may at any moment bring to light a new vein of precious metal.

Yes, however barren the church may at any time be of spiritual life and converting influence, it is assuredly never so poor and destitute of the fruits of Divine grace as we in our doubtfulness are apt to imagine. I am persuaded that if it should only please God to lift the veil, we would be surprised at any moment with a spectacle which could only be compared with the final resurrection. As when a general plans an ambuscade, he breaks up his squadrons into small detachments, and plants a straggling handful here and there, in cave and hollow, amid rocks and bushes, so that nothing is seen but the bare mountain and the lonely silent forest. But when the enemy thoughtlessly draws near, the trumpet gives the signal, and straightway a cloud of warriors arises from the earth as by enchantment and hurls its thunders on the foe, to his mortal terror and the loud triumph and applause of the friendly legions that survey the scene. Thus the Captain of the heavenly host has an ambushed army in the world, and he needs only to blow the trumpet, as he will do in due time, according to Zech. x. 8, to call up sights before us like that which Elijah's servant saw on the mount of Dothan, 2 Kings vi. 17. How often has it happened in a church in

which for years there had been a famine of the bread of life, and where there was room for doubt whether a single real believer was concealed, that a single sermon by a stranger, who awakened the old sound of the gospel in its pulpit, has proved the signal for calling forth, all at once, numbers of timid sheep from their concealment, who gathered themselves, after service, around the valued stranger, to be taught the way of God more perfectly, and to enjoy a little longer the beams of that blessed light which had long been quenched in their own sky. May not such experiences, of which there are not a few, be regarded by us as the grapes brought back by Caleb and Joshua from the promised land, which gave evidence of the riches of whole vineyards that remained to be explored.

Ah, how great shall be our surprise at the last, when eternity shall lift up every veil, and disclose to us that portion of the Church of God, which remained here on earth withdrawn from our view, either by the soft disguise of reserve and modesty, or the unhappy cover of fear of persecution, or the dark screen of a faulty and deficient Christian practice, through which the light of faith did not force its way! And not only in eternity, but also in this world, such a joyfully surprising disclosure of the hidden Church awaits us; and who knows how near the days may be, when the prophetic question of the Song of Songs (vi. 10.) shall resound in the church, "Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?"

III. When you look up in the day-time to the heavens, tell me where are the stars of God? They stand there as ever fixed in the firmament, but the eye cannot distinguish them. Wait until evening. Night invites them forth from their concealment, and in the dark you behold their gentle rays again glancing from above. As the natural stars, so are the stars in the firmament of grace. In the sunshine of gentle and untroubled days of peace, they are scarcely to be discerned, and the distinction between

them and the better sort of men of the world is often far from striking. But have patience till evening, and their glory will burst forth upon you in all its radiance. As doubtless, at the time when Hazael the Syrian broke in upon the land with fire and sword, the seven thousand in Israel were brought to light ; so also, on the day of the mighty sifting which awaits the Christian world, we shall be better able rightly to measure the temple of the Lord upon earth.

These days of purification are rapidly hastening on. The most varied signs are no longer awanting, which, as the storm-birds foretel the hurricane, announce to us the approach of the period when the Lord will appear with his fan in his hand, and will thoroughly purge his floor. The cry of the watchmen upon Zion's walls becomes daily more loud and alarming. Prophecy hastens to its fulfilment. If it should come to pass, that the mark of the beast is branded on our foreheads at the point of the sword, and nothing but an open denial of Christ and his gospel can save from torture or a bloody death, the dross will then be separated from the fine gold in the church ; and it will be made apparent where the essence of godliness was to be found, and where only the tinsel counterfeit. Ah, how many stars, of which we now have no such presentiment, will then fall from the firmament of the Church, since they shone only with their own light, and not with the true lustre of Christ's grace ; and what clouds of chaff shall we see scattered by the wind, that now appear only as rich garners of wheat ! For every spirit that was not the Spirit of the Lord, shall be unable to withstand the fiery trial of those days, and all shall appear in the shame of its own nakedness, that now assumes the ornaments of the sanctuary of itself, and has not been clothed with them by the hand of the Lord.

But just at this very time, when the trees which have no firm root shall be overthrown ; and when, on the one hand, there shall be no end of the ranks of false brethren that take their departure, the thousands, on the other hand,

of whom we know nothing at present, shall cast away their disguise, and with the cries of "Hosannah," shall gather under the banner of the martyrs. If no other choice remains, but between Christ and Belial, then those who, like Nicodemus, have shunned disclosure, shall no longer hesitate to avow themselves openly on the side of Christ. Many who now cannot resist a look of irony, and are ready to give up the honour of their Master through fear of ridicule, will then, when the danger of confessing Christ waxes greater, stand all at once like heroes on the field. He who formerly could deny his Lord to escape the raillery of a maid-servant, will now, for his Lord's sake, submit to be nailed to the cross, when no simple denial will save him, but a solemn forswearing of allegiance to his Saviour. The most gentle and dove-like temper, that in its calm retreat, amid prayer and meditation, busied itself little with the outward world, will now, when insulted with the proposal to deny the Lord of glory, kindle in holy zeal, and feel constrained to bid adieu to its seclusion, and go forth without the camp bearing the reproach of Immanuel. Many, whose wings drooped in the days of repose, will now, when the sky is overcast, mount up and brave the storm like young eagles; and the weakest and most timid in the Church shall be as David. Thus one joyful appearance after another shall surprise us in those days. The deeper the night, the more richly gemmed and bright will be the firmament. The elect shall be gathered from the four winds, and shall come forth from their disguise like a new and blooming creation; and we shall be "like them that dream," when we hear our own hosannah sent back a thousand-fold in living echoes from the ends of the earth.

But what will strike us with the greatest and most agreeable surprise in that time, if we live to see it, is, that it will be given to us poor timid sheep who are so weak in faith, for the sake of Jesus, if need be, to descend cheerfully into the furnace of trial, and to glorify God by a dying testimony. What the Lord says of the seven thou-



sand in our text, will then apply to us, "I have reserved them unto me;" and no one who is reserved for God has any ground of fear. They are reserved, into whatever temptations and struggles they may fall. Sin in their members may, indeed, alarm and wound, but it cannot destroy or slay them; they are *reserved*. Satan may sorely buffet them, and bring them close to the pit; but he cannot overwhelm them, they shall keep the field more than conquerors. The world may invade them with formidable assaults, and oppress them for a season; but that is the utmost. At last, though soiled with the dust of conflict, they escape victorious from the yoke. "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world," saith the Lord. And thus they are reserved, however unworthy, when the last fires of purification shall be kindled on the earth, and the overflowing scourge of final trial shall pass through the church and the world. Be of good cheer, therefore, all of you who are in the Lord! Come what will, the seed of Jacob is reserved. The Almighty himself is the rock on which the church is built; how then should the gates of hell prevail against her? Let the clouds gather and portend the storm; let Hazael and Jehu whet their swords and make them ready! "Yet," saith the Lord, "have I left me seven thousand in Israel; all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him."

Let us then, my brethren, open our hearts to the consoling hope, that not only we ourselves shall be certainly preserved, though thousands fall at our right hand, and ten thousand at our left, but that an innumerable company besides, shall, at the sound of the signal of great tribulation, disclose themselves all around us, of which, as yet, in the feebleness of our faith, we have hardly dreamed. For thus saith the Lord, Zech. x. 9, "I will sow them among the people, and they shall remember me in far countries; and they shall live with their children and turn again." Yes, he has scattered them like grains of seed all over the

world, that, under the dews of his Spirit, they may spring up as "the planting of the Lord that he may be glorified." Every place and every family, where such living seed is deposited, though it were no more than a single grain, may be already accounted blessed. Who can tell how this single grain may multiply and increase! Often, indeed, that holds true of this seed, which the apostle affirms of the natural grain of wheat, "that it is not quickened except it die." Believing parents, friends, and teachers, must often first be laid in the dust, and then their prayer is visibly heard; their example and exhortations come home with mighty power to the heart; the blossoms of spiritual life first rise from their ashes; the penitential tears of bereaved friends first fall on their graves, and the harvest of their sowing is not reaped except around their tombs. Their labour is never in vain in the Lord; the stock of the pious will not die in the ground. "They that were sown," saith the Lord, "shall live with their children and turn again; they shall increase and be multiplied."

Let us rejoice then, my friends, at so elevating a prospect. Let us, in judging of the kingdom of God, break loose from those fetters of narrow-mindedness, in which former generations were held bound. Let us renounce the habit of selecting outward marks and tokens of saintship, which, as they are not set forth by the great Shepherd, cannot but be presumptuously applied by us in estimating the number of his flock. Time was, when a man was accounted a saint of God, only when he was cast in this mould, and squared after that pattern; and, generally, the badge of distinction was a poor and insignificant formality, some fashion of dress, or gesture, or speech, or place, or ritual; some phrase of doctrine, or shibboleth of party. But this time is gone by. Judgment in the church of God has now become more strict, because more spiritual; and yet, at the same time, more liberal and free from prejudice. We look not at the garb and cut of outward ceremonial, but at the spirit and life which shines through it; and where these are wanting, we will not be

duped and blinded by the trappings of form. But where the breath of that life comes fresh upon our souls, no matter from what community, we give full course to our joy, and seek no outward uniformity in the church of God. Nay, we find it a beauty of Zion, that unity and variety so harmoniously adorn her towers and her palaces. Let this, my friends, be your favourite rule of judgment ; and in the measure in which your charities enlarge, will the Christian world assume a happier and more hopeful aspect.

Away then with that spiritual hypochondria, whose gloomy reflections overcast even the bright side of the Church of God with the shades of night, and which delights with its dismal oracles to eclipse even the star of hope, and to hide by its portents of clouds and storm the prospect of better days to come. Let us chase away the bird of night by pouring in upon its darkling haunts the bright rays of Divine promise, and forget its dirges of woe in the sweeter chorus with which all birds of happier omen are already saluting the rising sun. We know who is king in God's holy hill of Zion, and to whom the uttermost parts of the earth are given for a possession. "Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him. He shall build the temple of the Lord, and give himself no rest until he has made Jerusalem a praise in the earth. The earth shall be full of the knowledge and glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea ; and they shall come from the east and from the west, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God." Isa. xl. 10, lxii. 7, xi. 9, Matt. viii. 11. Seeing, then, that we know these things, we rejoice greatly, and look upon the world, not in the gloomy colouring of our own distempered vision, but in the dawning radiance of the Sun of Revelation. Christ must reign ; and Mount Zion be exalted above all the mountains of the earth. We will not let our eye be clouded nor our heart depressed by the shades of the present, while our hope is fixed on the golden age that lies beyond. Faith plants already amid the hottest of the con-

flict the standard of victory, for it sees the end: and, though the trophies of Satan be exalted to heaven, Faith is not dismayed. It sings of the triumph of the Lord; for there waves on its banner, as a sacred device, that mighty word of the Most High,—“I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return: That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear, and say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength.” Isa. xlv. 23, 24.

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## VII.—THE CALLING OF ELISHA.

If we find everywhere occasion to admire the “ manifold wisdom ” of our blessed Saviour, it is yet nowhere more admirable than in his intercourse with sinners. The minute regard which we find him taking of the nicest shades of individual character, in the most various instances, and the wonderful discrimination with which he treats every one exactly as his temper and circumstances required, are matter of unbounded astonishment, and discover to us the Searcher of hearts, “ who knew what was in man.”

We have a striking example of this in Luke ix. 54—62. We here see the Saviour dealing with the four principal temperaments of human nature, the choleric, the sanguine, the phlegmatic, and the melancholy; and how masterly is the style in which each is treated!

First, we have the choleric temperament, with its violent excitability, and its strong though speedily exhausted impulse to activity. The inhabitants of a Samaritan village in which Jesus, on his way to Jerusalem, intended to lodge, refused to receive him; when his disciples James and John heard this, they were excited to violent anger, and in fierce exasperation these “ sons of thunder ” come before their Master, and with flashing eyes appeal to him, “ Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, as Elias did ? ” Here we have the choleric disposition. And the Lord, to cool their hot indignation, and temper their

spirits to a softer strain, in the most admirable manner refrains from uttering a word of direct reproof, which would have been to pour oil upon the flame, but presents his own heart as a contrast to theirs, and opens to them a humbling view into the depth of his love for sinners, and the compassionate design of his mission. "The Son of man," he says, "is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." What could have been more appropriate to allay their sinful excitement, to teach them a needful lesson of humility, and to give their feelings a different tone, than these gracious and gentle words of the compassionate Friend of sinners?

Shortly after this scene, a person comes up to Jesus with great marks of readiness and joy, and addresses him in the language of fresh excitement, "Lord, I will follow thee, whithersoever thou goest." Here we have the sanguine temperament, with its quick impulse, its wide susceptibility of feeling, its rapid faculty of conclusion; but at the same time, with its defect of deep and abiding impression, of laborious effort, and of perseverance. The Saviour saw into the inmost depths of this man's character, and knew that his purpose was formed in the heat of the moment, under the immediate influence of his own splendid miracles and divinely gracious aspect. He, therefore, recalls the enthusiast from his momentary fervour to calmness and discretion, and teaches him to sit down and count the cost of his offer of service. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."

Another soon falls in the way, who is not so hasty with his acceptance of discipleship. "Follow me," says the Lord with distinctness and emphasis. But he replies, "Suffer me first to go and bury my father;" as if he had said, "Allow me to live in my father's house till he dies; I will then reflect farther on the subject." Who can mistake in this man the phlegmatic temperament, with its slow excitability, its calm equanimity, its cautious reflectiveness, which, though free from hazard, of violence, and

mischievous, pass too readily into timidity, indifference, and sloth. Our Lord again treats this person in a wonderful manner, as befitted his disposition. His language is strong, penetrating, arousing, and fitted to beget rapid and steadfast decision in this procrastinating spirit. "Let the dead bury their dead, but go thou and preach the kingdom of God."

The Lord meets with a fourth, whom he had probably anticipated also, by saying to him, "Follow me." But he replies with clouded brow and downcast look, "Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first bid them farewell which are at home at my house." Can you doubt of what temperament this man is? It is the melancholy, with its faculty of slow, but deep and lasting excitement, which comes more by stealth, than sudden surprise; its prevailing tendency to care and sadness, its capacity of labour and energetic devotion to its purposes. These characteristics appear in his very language to our Lord. The first thing that the call of Jesus suggests to him, is its dark and fearful consequences. His brooding mind is full only of presentiments of suffering or death, and so he will once more embrace his relatives, and stretch the hand of farewell to them, it may be, for the last time. Here there was needed, most of all, a firm, courageous, and ministering word, that would scatter the clouds of his depression, and help his resolution to break forth through a host of fears. He needed an arousing call to the standard; and this the Lord addresses to him, "No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." In all these cases, we are at a loss which most to admire, the penetrating glance of the Searcher of hearts; the skill of the great Physician; the infinite condescension of the Prince of Peace.

In the last of these occurrences, which we have hastily reviewed, there appears an allusion to a scene of the Old Testament history. What the person whom Jesus called here requests for himself, is the same favour that Elisha asked of Elijah before he followed at his call and our

Lord, in the words, "He that putteth his hand to the plough," &c., appears to have intended to hold up the conduct of Elisha to imitation as an example of quick and cheerful decision. You ask, in what the excellence of this example consisted? Our present lecture shall answer this question.

1 KINGS xix. 19—21.

"So he departed thence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him. And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee. And he said unto him, Go back again: for what have I done to thee? And he returned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat; then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him."

Elijah has returned from Horeb, with lightened heart, and hopes more high than at any former period of his prophetic labour. We now find him in the country of Samaria, about to accomplish the commission which the Lord had laid upon him. *He calls Elisha, and Elisha obeys the call*; these are the two points which are now to be considered.

I. The scene of our history is changed. From the lonely and dreary desert around Mount Sinai, we are carried back with the prophet to the smiling lowlands of Jordan, and walk upon the fruitful plains that surround the little town of Abel-Meholah. We here meet with twelve husbandmen behind their ploughs; eleven of them are servants,—the twelfth is the son of the rich proprietor himself. His name is Elisha, and his father's Shaphat. He does not think it beneath his dignity to put his own hand to the work; he drives in the sweat of his brow his yoke of oxen before him, like one of his servants. It was a pleasure, at this season, to be abroad in the fields, and to walk behind the plough. The blessing of God filled all the air with fragrance, and the fields, that for three years and a half had been a barren wilderness, appeared now, after the copious floods of rain, impatient of the seed.

time, to unfold, in the luxuriance of blade and ear, their newly derived powers. How often may these husbandmen, as they broke up their genial furrows, have talked with each other of the mighty wonders with which Jehovah had lately visited their native land ! How often may the name of Elijah have been mentioned, and the fiery sign on Carmel made the subject of the liveliest discussion ! For they had probably been eye-witnesses of that great miracle ; and might belong to the seven thousand that had not bowed their knees to Baal. It may be, that they were even now conversing of those wonderful days, when, behold, a man draws near to them, clad in a hairy mantle, and with a leathern girdle about his loins. He approaches with firm step ; and the oxen stand still, and the husbandmen look at each other with inquiring faces, as if they would say, “ Who can this stranger be, and what brings him here ? ” But who shall describe their joyful surprise, as they recognize in this solitary traveller, who now hastens forward with quicker steps to the son of Shaphat, the very man whose name and deeds resounded through the whole country—Elijah the Tishbite.

Elijah, says the sacred historian, *found* Elisha. Whether he knew him before, or now discovered him by a special miracle, we are not informed. This much we may be certain of, that Elijah had not for a long time made a more valuable acquaintance. Elisha was the first child of God, whom, after a long period of solitude, he had the happiness to meet ; and he found in the person of the son of Shaphat, the first and chief of the seven thousand, and the first living seal of the promise granted him in the miraculous appearance at Horeb, on behalf of his people. The simple and pious Elisha was the man in whose mission would be heard, through the land of Israel, the still small voice of God’s tender mercy and redeeming love, to convert and win their hearts to the Lord. He was the first messenger of Jehovah who was called to sow the seed of peace in the furrows which his precursor had torn up by judgments, and to make the bones that had been broken



to rejoice. In his very name we have an indication of his peculiar commission. Elisha signifies, "My God is salvation," and it may be written as a running title over his whole history. His labours, as compared with those of his great predecessor, appear evangelical. He goes about in meekness; and his course is calm and noiseless. His footsteps are attended everywhere by benefits and blessings; and it is not the terrible majesty or the burning jealousy of the Lord, but the mild and gracious light of Jehovah's condescension, that shines in almost all his actions. He stretches not forth his hand to shut heaven, but to bring down its showers of blessing. He opens not his mouth in sentences of wrath and terror; but his doctrine drops as the rain, and his speech distils as the dew. His office is to help and heal. The great doctrine of his prophetic life is, "The Lord is gracious." A new period was, therefore, to commence with Elisha's mission, in the providential training of Israel; a season of Divine loving-kindness, after the days of penal judgments and legal thunders; a time of the still small voice, after the storm, the earthquake, and the fire. Elijah foresaw this, at least obscurely; and hence we may conceive with what delight he must have embraced Elisha, as the man in whom his dearest hopes of the regeneration of Israel were centred.

Elijah found him behind the plough. It is not without reason that this is expressly recorded in the history. We are furnished in this with a pleasing picture of a man, who, with all his gifts, remained poor and lowly in his own eyes, and led a humble and unassuming life. Others, in his place, would soon have come to the conclusion that they were too good for the plough, and born for a higher sphere than that of a simple farmer, and that they ought not to bury their talents in obscurity, but cultivate them in schools of learning, and then come forth on the stage of public life, to enlighten and guide the world. Such thoughts never once occurred to Elisha. His pretensions went not beyond his plough and his husbandry; he saw his vocation to these quiet and rural occupations, and was

perfectly satisfied with his lot, and had no wish to "seek great things for himself." How much more amiable and beautiful is this temper than the opposite one, of which we find in the present day too many examples among Christians. "Labour for the kingdom of God," is become the universal watchword of our times. We rejoice in it, but with mingled feelings. Alas, how much do we see of vanity and self-complacent love of management manifesting itself on this field of activity! Hardly has any one made up his mind that he has about some small measure of spiritual gifts, than he begins to regard himself as a pillar of the church of God. The condition and calling in which he has hitherto been is now no longer suited to him. He must talk of a "*higher sphere of usefulness*," to which he feels himself born. He must propose to become minister, missionary, or professor, and yet, all the while, the inward call to which he appeals may be nothing more than a vain ambitious movement of his own heart. Doubtless, we should let our light shine before men; only, each in the situation where God has fixed his lot. The Lord does not intend by such a direction to make all "his people prophets." It is not merely thy lips, but thy life from which the light is to radiate. It is in the total impression which thy life has made on the church and on the world, that we are to seek its worth as a missionary life; its influence as a manifestation of the glory of God. Didst thou but make others feel, in all thy purposes and actions, that thou art partaker of a higher life, and that there dwells in thee a more than mortal happiness, thou wouldst then cast around thee that blessed heavenly light of which thy Saviour speaks; and thou wouldst preach the gospel as the "power of God," more effectually than can be done by words. And remember that those spiritual lights have the purest radiance, that shine unconscious of their own brightness; and that those divine flowers diffuse the sweetest fragrance which bloom in the hidden spots where God has placed them, and court the shade.

One reason why we find, in the present day, so much

unauthorised eagerness to press upon the stage of public activity is the great poverty of the times in truly great and commanding religious spirits. No eagle pinions at present soar in our firmament; and hence the smaller birds want a measure of their own littleness, and are not ashamed to regard that scantling of spiritual gifts which they possess as an evidence of a Divine call to great and exalted things.

Away from the walls of Zion with this ill-omened and vain activity, which is not of the Father, but of the world! Away from the sacred inclosure of the chosen people with that accursed idolatry of human instruments, which so mournfully prevails in the church of God! I am persuaded that God, in our days, often calls home his most excellent servants and evangelists in the bloom of life and in the full harvest of activity, to secure them from the peril of that idolatrous admiration with which, in what are called religious periodicals, these mortal men are wont to be exalted to heaven; and to teach the church that the pillars of his temple are not flesh, that wisdom does not die with any creature, and that none is the basis, the support, and builder up of his kingdom, but Himself alone.

When Elijah has found Elisha, he takes his prophet's mantle from off his own shoulders, and throws it over those of the son of Shaphat, in his own deeply significant way, without uttering a word. What must have been the feelings of the plain and unassuming husbandman on the occasion! for he well understood the momentous symbol, and could see nothing less in it than his consecration to the prophetic office, and his call to be the assistant, successor, and representative of the Tishbite.

After Elijah had cast his mantle over his successor, he went away without uttering a word; and this he did to make the meaning of the symbolical action still more impressive. Elisha perfectly understood it. He lays the reins on the necks of the oxen, leaves them with the plough standing in the midst of the field, and hastens after the man of God. We do not hear that he resisted the call

with all manner of objections, or, as is common on such occasions, made many words about the too great honour done him, or his own incapacity for such an office. No, the matter was shortly and summarily settled. He looked not at the call, but its Author; not at himself, but promised grace and strength. He leaves in God's hands the dignity and burden of his new office; the counting of the cost, thinks he, is spared me by the Lord's immediate call; and he takes the prophet's girdle and mantle with as much equanimity as formerly the plough and the mattock. O precious simplicity, lovely serenity of a humble and child-like spirit!

Elisha, however, had more to leave than his team and field. His father and mother were still alive, and he felt bound to apprise them of his high calling, and to desire their parental blessing. Accordingly, he asks of Elijah a short interval, saying, "Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee." And here I cannot but remark, how differently the history of Elisha begins from that of Elijah. We saw the Tishbite descend from the mountains of Gilead like a being from another world. After his descent and family connexions we inquire in vain. He comes upon the stage like a divine meteor, and his first salutation to us is a word of omnipotence, "As the Lord, the God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word!" And as we know nothing of his human relatives, so the softer feelings of human affection and tenderness seem foreign to his exalted nature; and he steps forth gigantically, rising above his age and generation, *an original man* in every point of view. There is scarcely a trace of captivating frankness and condescension in his whole history. He that would understand him must seek to rise to his level. An imposing majesty surrounded his whole demeanour, and kept everything about him, as Mount Sinai did the Israelites, at a reverential distance.

Now the character of Elisha, and the manner of his

first appearance are of a quite different order. He appears a man of the ordinary stamp. His descent, birth, vocation, and outward relations, lie enveloped in no impenetrable mystery. The sacred narrative leads us back to his cradle, and the house of his parents. We are made acquainted with his occupation and connexions; we see him follow the plough like any of his servants, and find in him a man with all the ordinary feelings of humanity in his breast, with the share of other men in domestic joys and sorrows; bound like them in the ties of blood, of affection, and of tenderness to the circle in which he lives; a stranger to none of the sensibilities of our nature, but feeling the pain of separation and taking leave of friends, and in every sense endowed with a human heart like that which beats in our own bosoms. No awful barriers of dignity stand around him; we can confidently approach him, and feel his presence quicken our trust and love.

All this points to the contrast between the office of Elisha, and that of his more stern precursor. Elijah was like another Moses, a herald of the Divine holiness, and an ambassador of God's wrath against all who violate his law; and, therefore, it behoved him to appear as he did, encircled by the glory of the thrice Holy One, and let down all at once as from the throne of him who is a consuming fire. Elisha, on the contrary, was appointed an evangelist and messenger of the grace of Jehovah, and hence he required to appear in the radiance of a milder light. His office was not to threaten and to terrify, but to allure, to win, to convert. Hence God sent him to dwell in the tents of his brethren as one of themselves, and set him forth as a friend, in whose presence the most timid might feel emboldened, and whose humane and affable intercourse might operate benignly on the minds of all.

Elisha, then, must bid farewell to his father and mother. In this he shews himself a dutiful and affectionate son; and our interest is immediately increased in every one, though an entire stranger to us, in whom this trait of character appears. We cannot bring ourselves to imagine

that the grosser vices can grow on the same soil with filial piety. Partings in some degree similar to that which Elisha had now to undergo, but unspeakably more bitter and painful, are those Sunderings of soul from soul which take place in consequence of the genuine call of grace, when Christ comes into a family, not to unite, but to divide parent from child, and friend from friend. What is every true conversion but a leave-taking of all unconverted men, a hastening away out of their moral atmosphere, a withdrawing from the domain of their thoughts, opinions, dreams, wishes, and efforts, into a totally different, and, to them, strange and distant province. No doubt, a happy severance for those who thus "come out and are separate;" but it has its pain and bitterness too; for it is clouded by the awful uncertainty, whether the objects of affection, now left behind, may ever rejoin us to all eternity; and what thought can be more painful than this? If there be any one whose dearest friends are still among those who are without, and who has, notwithstanding, felt no pang of separation, let me tell him with all plainness, that he either has no love for those whom nature has most closely joined to him, or is in no respect as yet essentially separated from them; and though he may put on the form of an outward difference, is radically at one with them in the views and dispositions of an unconverted heart.

It happens, occasionally, that this spiritual separation takes place amid much excitement of passion, with anger and strife, and that not merely on the part of those who remain behind; (who can be surprised at this?) but even of those, who, as they say, "bid farewell to the world." I conceive, however, that it is unspeakably more in accordance with the nature of genuine conversion, that the separation take place, on the side of the converted, with tears and embraces, as in Elisha's case; and I confess, that where I see it otherwise, it wounds me to the heart, and so cools my affection towards the new brother, that I cannot with my whole soul bid him welcome. I have seen many a soul leave the world and turn to the Lord; but O

how bitter the partings were, where the conversion was a work of good earnest. It seemed as if the persons had never loved their relatives till now ; and in a certain sense this was true. " Oh that my dear father, or my dear mother, would but accompany me ! Oh that my brother, or my friend, would choose the same good part ! " How tenderly did they then entreat them, " Be ye reconciled unto God." What anxiety to perceive any traces of the work of grace in these dear relatives ! What inward sighing and supplication, " O Lord, have pity on them also, and heal their souls, as thou hast done mine ! " What a mourning and weeping, " O Absalom, my son, my son ! " Happy is the man whom the hand of mercy has led forth from the multitudes of the blind and dead into the kingdom of light ; but happier he, who, when God bids him arise and depart, need not bid his dearest on earth farewell, but can rejoin them with the welcome greeting, " Behold, here am I also ; ye went before me, but by God's grace I have followed after you ; my name is written with yours in the same book of life, and your Lord and Master is now also mine." O what a blessed welcoming and embracing is this Lost, but now found ; once severed, but now united for ever and for ever ! O ye converted parents of unconverted children, and ye believing children of unbelieving fathers and mothers ! soon may such a joyful day dawn on your dwellings !

Elijah has no objection to Elisha's request. " Go," said he, " and return again." And to make his parting more easy, he adds the words, "*Consider* what I have done to thee ;" \* and thereby fixes, as it were, a bond around his heart, which should ensure his return. He would thus be reminded of the solemn act of investiture which had just taken place, and the words would sound like a call of God in his ear, enabling him to withstand all the endearments of the parental roof, if he should be tempted by them to falter in his purpose. But we have no reason to believe that he was exposed to any such seduction. His

father's house was not to him a snare and a deep pit, as it has been to many converted children ; his father and mother were, in all probability, pious and devout persons. It was doubtless no small sacrifice to give up a dutiful and affectionate son, probably their only son, and the joy and prop of their old age, and that too, to a public office, that could not but expose him, in an idolatrous age, to the greatest peril of his life ; but the command was from the Lord, and they no doubt were enabled to say with joy, "The will of the Lord be done."

While Elijah was proceeding on his journey towards the city of Samaria, Elisha goes with a beating heart to his father's house, and relates to his astonished parents the whole circumstances of the interview, in which Elijah had called him to so high an office. This done, he takes the yoke of oxen which he had been accustomed to drive, slaughters them, perhaps in sacrifice, boils the flesh with the instruments of the oxen, and gives it unto the people to eat. The whole action was significant. Elisha sealed by it his covenant with the Lord, took a solemn leave of his previous station, life, and occupation, and testified his entire and unhesitating surrender and dedication of himself to God, who had called him to his office. A like procedure, my friends, must take place, in substance, in our own houses and hearts, if we desire to enter into life. "He that forsaketh not all he hath," saith Jesus, "cannot be my disciple." Whatever thou lovest out of him, or more than him, thou must bring to his cross and slay it before him. Is mammon thy idol ? Renounce it, else Satan holds thee by a golden chain. Is it worldly honour ? Away with it ; cast back the baubles of this sorceress in scorn, and seek the honour that cometh from God only. Is it wisdom and understanding ? Renounce them, and become a fool for Christ's sake. Is it indulgence, luxury, and pride ? Burst the slavish bonds, and crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts. We cannot be the Lord's, unless we are so entirely, with all that we have and are. He must be our whole portion, our all in



all. And not only must we give up the golden calves themselves, the outward objects of sinful enjoyment; but the very reins and harness by which they drag us after them, our inward lust and concupiscence must be cast off, nay, most earnestly of all devoted to destruction, and hewn asunder by the sword of the Lord from heaven. "Whole burnt-offerings" are what the Lord requires for his altar; and his watchmen cry, "Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence; be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord."

Once more we enter the peaceful house at Abel-meholah, where a new scene presents itself. The solemn act of dedication is over, and the aged parent, his wife, and the servants of the household have sat down to the friendly meal which the parting Elisha had provided for them. It was such a feast as that at which Levi, the new disciple, entertained his Lord, when he put to shame the false austerity and captious ignorance of the Pharisees. It was a feast of joy called forth by the signal honour which the Lord had done to Elisha and his house. It was a farewell feast, in which the ties that bound heart to heart might be strengthened, and affection might prepare itself for a long living on tender recollections. Elisha, the master of the feast, appears already in his new character of prophet; and the old relations of every kind seem done away. His parents look on with strange solemnity, and with the submission due to a minister of Jehovah. The servants who formerly associated with him as an equal, now sit still and silent, and cannot help looking up to him with eyes of wonder; hanging on his lips, and feeling themselves deeply honoured when he addresses them with his former kindness. There is joy and cheerfulness in the hearts of all, but a calm reverence has entered the house, and surrounded the table, as if a prince sat beside it, or an angel were entertained at it not "unawares." The emotions of Elisha himself may be imagined. Here he felt himself at home no longer. The present had lost for him its interest, and his thoughts wandered into the future.

The mysterious memento which Elijah had left with him, had stirred his mind with the deepest emotions. He knew well that the casting of the mantle over him was the omen of great events, though what these events were to be, he could not tell. A whole world of great presentiments was opening up before him. Dear as his father's house was to him, the inward call was not to be resisted, and for his sake it was not to be lamented that the hour of parting came so soon. Once more he gives his parents a tender embrace. The thoughts that are too deep for utterance shine through their mutual tears. With a convulsive start he breaks at length away from their arms, grasps with a brother's kindness the hand of each of his old associates and friends, and hastens forth sad and pensive from the house of his fathers. A pilgrim's staff, and the parental blessing, is all that he carries with him. He leaves the care of the future with cheerful resignation to Him who had called him to his service, and who clothes the lilies of the field. With rapid steps and lightening heart he wanders over the plain, and having turned round for the last time to bless the home of his childhood, and to commend its dear inmates to the care of the great Shepherd of Israel, he tarries no longer by the way, but hastens to overtake his master Elijah on the road to Samaria, and to meet the scenes of that wonderful future, which lay before him in magic light, a more than earthly perspective, a veiled and mystic world of wonder.

With such struggling of unutterable hope, and sense of sovereign attraction, have all of us, my brethren in the faith, followed the Lord Jesus, when he cast over our naked souls the mantle of his righteousness, and we found him to be the Leader of our salvation, and our guide to the Father. Then there was no more leaving of him for ever, and no tarrying behind with aught that before was dear; an unquenchable longing to be complete in union with Him allowed us, while out of Him, no peace or rest. Our whole desires have received their bias for eternity. A mighty attraction has drawn them all upwards, and

through all resistance they must follow Him to his throne. Let the might of earth or of hell turn the needle from its pole-star ; it is but for an hour or a day, and it recoils to its heavenly bent with a more sacred violence. The fire that fell from heaven into our hearts has kindled the sacrifice, and it must mount again to heaven in its own flames. The world is not our rest. The satisfaction, the repose, the very element of our souls, is the presence of Jesus. Would that this glorious picture, my dear flock, were realized in all of you. May the wing of Divine mercy overshadow you all on earth, and gather you all under it to everlasting Sabbath rest !

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### VIII.—NABOTH'S VINEYARD.

“ Truth, Lord ; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from the master’s table.” This was the believing answer with which the woman of Canaan surmounted the last obstacle by which Jesus had tried her faith. (Matt. xv. 27, 28.) And as the brightness of the sun is reflected in a dewdrop, the whole glory of the gospel and the deepest experience of all true Christians shines forth in these words of this poor outcast from the commonwealth of Israel.

“ Truth, Lord,” said the woman ; and how deep, my friends, is the import of that one word, “ Truth.” You remember the language of the Saviour, “ It is not meet to take the children’s bread and give it to *dogs*.” He had applied this term to her in common with all who are not children of the household. The woman answers, “ Truth, Lord ;” and thus confesses the justness of the title, and hence the condemnation of all who are in a state of nature. But she adds, “ yet ;” and in this the whole glory of the gospel shines. The words in her mouth stand very near each other ; but there stands between them a cross surrounded with the terrors of Divine wrath ; an altar streaming with the only innocent blood that ever flowed

on earth, a Lamb that taketh away the sin of the world; a Surety that receives the punishment due to the actual offenders. O blessed salvation! Though, fallen and condemned, we must sigh out, "Truth, Lord," the wonders of Calvary enable us to add our "Yet," with heartfelt joy. It is a great and difficult step to utter the former, as we see from the experience of David in the 32d Psalm. But it is not enough for salvation, unless we add the latter, as we see from the case of Cain and Judas. The union of both, as in this poor woman of Canaan, is required to form the true saint of God; and wherever the deep feeling of guilt and misery is relieved of its bitterness by hope in the mercy of God in Christ, there and there only do we find the glory of the gospel reflected, and the genuine image of the Christian impressed on the soul.

Do you ask why I have commenced this discourse with this glimpse into the heart of the woman of Canaan? One reason is, that I wished to shed one cheering ray of light over the dismal night-piece which we are about to contemplate; and another is, that I thought it might contribute to guide our judgment of the heart of Ahab, whom we are to hear uttering the same words, "Truth, Lord," in this and the following narrative. Alas, his confession left him short of eternal life, since it was not followed by the humble and believing words of that firstling of the Gentiles at the coast of Sidon.

1 KINGS xxi. 17—21.

"And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it. And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the Lord, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine. And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord. Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity, and will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel."

About the time when Elijah called Elisha from the plough, and consecrated him to be a prophet, a bloody

war broke out in Israel. Ben-hadad king of Syria suddenly invaded the country with an immense army, commanded by two-and-thirty tributary princes ; but by the help of God he was defeated and compelled to sue for peace. Where Elijah abode, during these tumultuous times, we are not informed. It is only after the troubles are over, that we see him again appear in the narrative, and then as an ambassador of the God of Justice. He is sent to Samaria to reprove king Ahab for his sin. This mission of Elijah is the theme of our present meditation. We shall consider, I. Its occasion. II. Its purpose. III. Its immediate result.

I. The word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, " Arise, go down to meet king Ahab of Israel, which is in Samaria ; behold he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it." Thus the crime which Ahab had committed against Naboth, was the occasion of the prophet's mission to the capital. The monstrous iniquity which the court had been guilty of, in the case of this pious Israelite, is so well known to you, that I need only briefly recapitulate the details. We already know the character of king Ahab, and have seen, that, however wicked and tyrannical he was, this proceeded not so much from malignant depravity, as from a total want of principle and independence. He had not the strength of character requisite to contrive and carry out, in cold blood, deep and extensive schemes of iniquity ; but was, on the contrary, a weak tool in the hands of others, pliant and unscrupulous enough, when it suited the purposes of profligate advisers ; but capable upon occasions, under better influence, of something like kindness and generosity. Thus his behaviour to the vanquished Syrian king was such, that the Lord had to reprove him for his ill-timed lenity ; " Because thou hast let go out of thy hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people." 1 Kings xx. 42. And yet, all but the very

next moment, we find him so wrought upon from without, that he could perpetrate the most execrable cruelties, especially when it did not endanger his own person. Under better influences, Ahab would probably have been a better king; but led as he was by such a woman as Jezebel, and the sycophant train of a court accomplished in every wickedness, it was no wonder that his character became utterly ruined, and that we find in him a melancholy example of a man, who is not totally impervious to good impressions, while yet his whole life is an unbroken series of iniquities and crimes.

As he was very effeminate and voluptuous, he left the affairs of his government, in a great measure, to Jezebel his queen, and was glad when he could pursue his pleasures with undisturbed ease. At the close of the late war, he had returned to his country residence at Jezreel. To pass away the time, he amused himself with planning alterations in his palace and gardens, and with enlarging and beautifying the grounds that surrounded them. Adjoining his magnificent garden, was a vineyard, the paternal inheritance of Naboth the Jezreelite. It occurred to Ahab, that his grounds would be much improved by the addition of this piece of land, and he set his heart on obtaining it. He lost no time in calling the proprietor before him, informed him of his desire, and offered him either an exchange of land, or, if he preferred it, the value of it in money according to his demand. Naboth, however, could not by any means entertain the idea of parting with land, his vineyard, since, according to the law of Moses, no Israelite was permitted to sell his inheritance. All land was to be considered as the property of Jehovah, of which each held an inalienable portion for his life-time. Exchange of land was permitted, but only till the year of jubilee, when it reverted to the original proprietor. From this Divine law Naboth would not deviate, and he would not consent to an exchange; because it was easy to foresee, that an idolatrous king would trouble himself little about the year of jubilee, or the laws of God respecting

it. Therefore he answered, "The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee." He was not afraid to confront the idolatrous monarch as a worshipper of the God of Abraham; and in this pious and independent man, we rejoice to find another of the seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

Ahab was not likely to brook such an answer. That his royal will should be thwarted, and his favourite plans marred; and that too by the independence of an adherent of the old law, and by the piety of a subject who, in defiance of royal mandate and example, had refused to worship the Sidonian idol, and kept stedfast to the faith of his fathers, this was to Ahab too mortifying to be endured. Deeply exasperated at the supposed insult to his dignity, as well as inflamed by the resistance to his wishes, he hastens back to his palace, behaves like a spoiled child whose humour has been crossed, throws himself upon his bed, turns his face to the wall, and refuses to eat. In this disconsolate plight Jezebel finds him; inquires with astonishment what has happened him, and learns the whole affair. "Indeed," exclaimed his wife, "Is that all? It would be a sorry kingdom where such a misadventure could not be put to rights. Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? Arise, and eat bread, and let thy heart be merry. I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." Thus, partly to avenge the insult offered to the royal dignity, and partly to attach her husband to her still more closely, she takes measures immediately to get possession of the vineyard at any price. She writes letters in Ahab's name; she misapplies the royal seal to instructions of which he knew nothing; she orders the nobles and elders of the town to proclaim a fast, which was wont to be done only upon occasion of some great calamity or dreadful crime. She directs them to assemble the people, to put Naboth on a mock trial before them, and to suborn two villains to give false evidence against him, and accuse him of having uttered blasphemies and curses against God and the king. This was done accord-

ingly ; Naboth was condemned unheard, given up to the excited populace, dragged out of the town, and stoned to death without mercy. And when the bloody execution was accomplished, Jezebel went in triumph to Ahab, and said, " Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money ; for Naboth is not alive, but dead." When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, the clouds of melancholy and chagrin disappeared from his brow ; the miserable man rose with an air of undissembled satisfaction, and hastened " to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite to take possession of it." Such was the atrocious crime, primarily, of Jezebel, but which Ahab made his own, by heartily approving of the infamous deed, and gladly seizing the miserable spoil. He would have perpetrated the deed himself, had he but possessed enough of the craft and strength of purpose for which his queen was so remarkable. They were both of them the murderers of Naboth, both defiled with his blood, both equally guilty, and deserving of punishment.

The atrocity was the more dark and execrable, because it was not obstinacy which induced the unfortunate Naboth to reject the king's offer, but faith in the God of his fathers, and obedience to his sacred institutions. Nay, we cannot doubt, as we have already observed, that this very fact exasperated his murderers, and enraged them against him to the highest degree. The world can bear no refusal worse, than that which is made from motives of piety and faith. Thus it has not unfrequently happened, that unbelieving masters have required their Christian servants to connive at some dishonest act in trade or business ; and when the latter have refused, nothing more would have been said of it, and all would have stood on the old footing, had they only assigned some worldly ground for their refusal, as that it was dangerous to adulterate goods in such a way, it might injure the interests of their master, and the like. But when, instead of this, they have appealed to the will of their Saviour, and referred to the



law of God as the reason of their refusal, they have had to stand a torrent of curses and revilings, and have been threatened with dismissal from their service or employment ; and though matters were not carried the length of a stoning to death, yet, so far as motives and principles are concerned, Ahab and Jezebel were there on the one side, and Naboth on the other.

II. The satisfaction of Ahab in this estate, thus violently acquired, was not of long duration. However secretly the murderers had acted their part, and devised their diabolical plans, One whose presence they had not suspected, had been in the council in which it was matured ; had read the blood-thirsty Jezebel's thoughts ; stood behind the seat as she wrote the false letters ; heard the rehearsal with the suborned witnesses ; known the whole mystery of iniquity from its beginning ; and, before the foul deed was done, had written it in his book as finished, and laid it up for judgment. This secret witness was no other than He, whose eyes are as a flame of fire. It was the Keeper of Israel, who neither slumbers nor sleeps, who reads the heart as an open book, whose eyes pierce through every den of darkness, who laughs at every veil of ingenuity, who understands the thoughts of sinners afar off, and is at home in the most hidden corners of their hearts. Surely he had seen it, and " had prepared for them the instruments of death, and ordained his arrows against the persecutors."

But why, when the Almighty saw the infamous deed from the first, did he not interpose to prevent it ? Why did he not rescue the innocent Naboth, who was his child and servant, and had been brought into peril by his faith and obedience ? For replies to such questions, the Scripture refers us to the world to come. Till then we must pass on in silence amid the thousand mysteries of the Divine providence that meet us on all sides, and in opposition to the doubts of reason, give God the glory by a faith that rests on the sure word of prophecy ; a faith

which tells us that "God's foolishness" is no other than adorable wisdom; that apparent contradictions and perplexities in his government form part of a plan and great system, which will at last constrain us to an admiration, all the more profound, the more it has in this life baffled our short-sighted reason. God's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor his ways our ways. "We do not understand his mode of government," says an enlightened writer, "and are always liable to go too far, both when we commend and when we find fault with it. His world is made to please himself, and our judgment is of small account in his sight." "It is a real absurdity," says the same author, "to wish for a hair more or less than we possess; and it is certainly better to be Elisha than Absalom; better to be Lazarus with his sores, than the rich man with his reversion of torment. Be the world the best it could be, or not, it is all one to us, if God but rule in it; or rather, in our hearts, for his ways will then always be right in our eyes."

No doubt an example like the death of Naboth, thus condemned, though innocent, and butchered by the hands of violence and outrageous oppression may sometimes put our faith to exercise, and shake the pillars of a theology that builds all on reason. But a deeper harmony rises above the discord, and is heard by the purified ears in a higher world. Let us leave the only wise God to do as seemeth him good. He will unravel in due time all the knots that now perplex us in our own life, or that of any of his people, to his own glory, and the highest good of all. Of this we may be certain, that Naboth did not appear with a complaint in his mouth, when he passed from the judgment-seat of falsehood and cruelty to the foot of the eternal throne, and opened those eyes which had closed amid the barbarous wounds of his enemies, amid the peaceful splendours of his eternal home. Doubtless his bloody death is now a matter of thanksgiving to him; and could he this day appear in the midst of us, our stumbling at God's dealings towards him would give him

pain, and he would call upon us to join him in adoring those dealings of Providence, as full of wisdom, and grace, and love.

All this you may allow is true ; but what becomes then of the promises of God, if a man like Naboth can have such an end ? I answer : The promises of God remain as they ever were, " They are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus." God has sworn it, " That all things shall work together for good to them that love him," and so it comes to pass. God has promised to be with them in fire and water, and so he is. But you take it for granted that he has promised that neither fire nor water shall come nigh them, neither pain nor mishap befall them, and this is altogether a mistake. Nay, rather, it is expressly said, " That through much tribulation they must enter into the kingdom of God ;" and the Saviour does not conceal it from his friends, that he appoints unto them the kingdom, " even as his Father hath appointed it to him." Luke xxii. 29. But methinks I hear you saying, " If this be so, we must live in perpetual anxiety, and cannot count with certainty upon deliverance from any danger. If we pass through a lonely place, we cannot tell whether we shall escape the hands of robbers and murderers. If we are crossing a river or the sea, we have no assurance that we shall not meet a grave in the waters. If work or wages are taken from us, we have no good ground of confidence that God will preserve us and our children from starvation. If the pestilence rages around us, we can have just as little security as an unbeliever, that the destroying angel shall pass over our dwelling. There are no promises that assure us of preservation from temporal misfortunes ; and hence, notwithstanding our adoption, we must be subject to the same alarms in every danger, as those who are strangers to the covenant of promise ?" No, my friends, such conclusions are erroneous. Though it is not *unconditionally* promised us, that we shall escape all dangers and misfortunes, " Yet he that believes," shall see the salvation of the Lord, " and all things are possible to him."

You know that great assurances are given us, assurances of unlimited extent; promises that leave nothing more to wish for. Be the trouble that threatens us of whatever kind it may, we need only, according to the express declaration of God, "to call upon his name," and we shall be delivered. Nay, the Saviour is our security, (John xv. 5.), that if we abide in him, we may ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us. But what is it to *abide in Jesus*? It is a glorious position, a great and important matter, which is pointed out to us by this expression. If I abide in Christ, according to the full sense of this language, I forget myself in him, I behold myself in him, and the evil conscience of sin is lost in the sense of his merits. I count myself as dead with him, risen with him, and exalted with him above the world, sin, and death. I rejoice in his righteousness as if it were my own. I know that God neither can nor will deny me any thing that is for my good, since I am his child, and well-pleasing to him in the Son of his love, and thus nothing prevents me from going with all my concerns to the footstool of my Father, and casting myself with all my cares on his paternal heart. This is to draw near in the "name of Jesus," and to this state of faith God has promised every thing that we can desire or pray for. Thus there may be a life free from care and fear, even amid a thousand dangers; there is a temper of mind in which we have in our hands a key to all the treasures of God, and at the same time an impenetrable shield against every danger both of body and soul. Only learn the happy art of abiding in Christ, and of asking in his name, then pray for good, or against evil, as thou wilt, and whilst thou art praying, thou hast thy petition.

But to return to our history. The black deed at Jezreel has been completed. Naboth lies a mangled corpse in the grave; but the voice of his blood rises from the sepulchre, and cries to Heaven for vengeance. The great Advocate and blood-avenger of his church hears it, and prepares for judgment. He summons his servant, the Tishbite, and

gives him a commission to king Ahab, " Arise, go down to meet Ahab, king of Israel, which is in Samaria ; behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it. And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine." Dreadful message ! One would think it must have stunned Elijah himself like a peal of thunder ; and doubtless it would, had he known only the terrible majesty of the Lord, and nothing of his grace ; and this very fact, that he gazed so often on the awful countenance of an avenging God, and yet remained calm and untroubled by fears of his own salvation, convinces us, among other things, that he must have seen God also in the face of Jesus Christ, and had much more than a glimpse of the whole plan of salvation in the gospel.

III. The king of Samaria is gratifying the lusts of his heart in the vineyard of Naboth. He exults over the rich plunder, and is considering how the field of blood should be best improved and united with his other grounds. But hark ! that is surely the sound of footsteps, and they are near at hand ! He turns about, and how great is his surprise and vexation, to behold a man approaching him, in whose stead he would gladly have seen a whole army marching against him, and who could never have come upon him more unseasonably than just at this moment. It was Elijah the Tishbite. The prophet had come like a thunder-cloud laden with death and ruin. He sends no one to announce his approach, or inquire whether it is the king's pleasure to admit him into his presence. He forces an audience for himself in the name of Jehovah, and makes no scruple of surprising the monarch in the midst of his pleasure-grounds and gardens, and in his hours of relaxation. How must Ahab have cursed the day of such a meeting ! He had flattered himself, perhaps, with the hope that he was rid of this unwelcome guest for ever. He had thought him far away beyond the

mountains ; or, what he would greatly have preferred, in his grave ; and all at once there he stands like an apparition from another world, nay, like the ghost of the murdered Naboth before him ! Deadly pale, and trembling with chagrin and fear, he sees the hateful messenger stalk forward to him ; and before Elijah had spoken a single word, his commission was in a certain sense discharged. Ahab reads the sentence of judgment in his looks, and a single stern glance of the prophet is enough to awaken his guilty conscience from its slumbers. “ Hast thou found me, O mine enemy ? ” he exclaims, as if by his fury and malignity he would frighten the prophet back ; but he merely betrays his own guilt, and becomes his own accuser.

How often, my brethren, must your ministers share the treatment of Elijah, even when they succeed in finding out sinners in the church, or when, more properly speaking, God finds them out by us ! Yes, when our words kindle a fire in the conscience, when the arrow hits the mark, and when our descriptions of the sinner are so exact, that one and another of our hearers must see his hateful deformities in the mirror we hold up to him, then it is immediately said to us in the hearts of those who are thus convicted, “ Hast thou found me, O mine enemy ? ” We are then malicious disturbers of men’s peace ; we have a pleasure in torturing their minds with needless scruples and alarms. We know nothing of love or Christian gentleness, and a gloomy austere enthusiasm is the highest form of religion which we recommend to our flocks. Our sermons are in every respect unsound, and are full of exaggeration. Instead of elevating the soul, and inspiring it with cheerful views of life, they only outrage its benevolent feelings, and provoke it to a dislike of all religion. Besides, there is in these barren harangues no trace of what is called genius or originality, and he that looks for solid instruction, had better apply to some other quarter. Such are the harsh judgments that we must submit to ; and it often happens that the offended parties do not

stop with words, but proceed to more practical criticisms. They will make us repent it, that we dared to disturb the peace of their consciences ; and so they resolve never more to hear us, but to go in future elsewhere. Go, ye stricken deer, whithersoever ye will ; it is not we, but God that has found you, and from him you cannot escape. The arrow has pierced through the joints of the harness, and what avails it to tear your flesh with its barbed point, since ye cannot get rid of it till the same Almighty hand from which it sped draws it forth out of the wound. If he is leading you to repentance, spare yourselves the fruitless labour of kicking against the pricks. No herb or balm of this world's compounding will avail to heal the wound that is rankling in your conscience. The burning in your heart will only increase from day to day ; the fire in your bones will spread wider and wider, till it is quenched by the blood of the Lamb. O could we but thus *find* you, we could be well contented for a while to be called your *enemies* !

Scarcely has the expression of rage and remorse, " Hast thou found me, O mine enemy ? " broke from the monarch's lips, when it returns upon him like a frightful echo in the answer of the prophet. " I have found thee," said Elijah, with his wonted self-possession and courage. How must these words have increased his agitation ; and yet, confounded and shut up to silence as he was by the dreadful accusations of his conscience, he saw himself utterly unable to meet the denunciation of the prophet by the smallest plea in his own defence. And then the terrible charge found him in Naboth's vineyard itself ; and the significant look with which the prophet accompanied the words, told the king too surely that his accuser knew whose the vineyard was, and what barriers of justice and humanity he had torn down to find his way into this unwonted walk of pleasure. Truly, it was a pitiable situation in which the monarch of Samaria at this moment stood ! He had never experienced such a disgraceful defeat before. The glory of his crown, and the splendour

of his purple, are gone; and he stands before Elijah a poor, naked, helpless delinquent, from whose hands every weapon, but stifled and impotent rage, has been struck or wrested; and it must have been painful to the Tishbite himself, to see his sovereign thus overpowered, confounded, and humbled before him; himself, as it were, become the king, and his master a cowering slave at his feet. Thus it is that the Lord can bring down the mighty by the breath of his mouth, and humble the proud ones, as the straw before the reaper's sickle.

You cannot but feel the numbing and deadening power in the stern coolness of the reply, "I have found thee." This is the remorseless language of the law, which freezes all the play and movements of self-righteousness into stone, and lays the chill hand of death on its hollow and consumptive hopes. How often has this sentence, coming from the throne of offended Majesty, driven the conscience-stricken sinner to the verge of despair, and threatened to confound his wavering reason. God grant in mercy, that this messenger of heavenly justice, if he find you now or afterwards in your false refuges, may come attended by the angel of peace, that the terrors of the law may be mingled in your experience of them with the hopes of the gospel! May the words of thunder, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law," sink and be lost in the joyful proclamation, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." May the sounds of doom, "Depart ye cursed," be drowned in your ears by the soul-reviving call, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Then shall the sorrow of the world that worketh death, be changed into that godly sorrow, "which worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of;" and the dreadful hardening of despair shall find its antidote in that melting contrition, which is the first sign of the "heart of flesh," and out of which shall grow all the love and rapture of unfading bliss. No, it is not the fiery terror of Divine jus-



tice that makes new creatures of us, but the reviving beams of Divine love to sinners that shine in the face of Jesus Christ. By the manger and the cross, and not amid Sinai's blackness, and darkness, and tempest, are the heirs of heaven born again. In the manifestation of "the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man," lies the marvellous attraction, that raises the children of the dust above themselves, and makes them "partakers of a Divine nature." Here the mighty power of love comes into play, and makes the sinner for ever the servant of his Saviour. But this service, (for what element can love exist in but service,) is the true, the only freedom. It is freedom from self as a law, and as an end, freedom from the world and all its vanities, freedom from the fetters of sin, and of the flesh. We then live to God, as from an urgent necessity of nature ; seek his honour, as by a sacred instinct ; run in the way of his commandments, as by a resistless impulse, and bring forth fruit unto God, by the same vital and spontaneous process as a plant shoots forth its blossoms, or the water bubbles from its springs. A heavenly liberty and a holy necessity are thus united in mysterious embrace ; man becomes the bondsman of love, but in its bonds he is divinely free ; free as God himself is free. Such are the blessed workings of the gospel ; the law does no such mighty works as these. Only where Divine love reigns in the soul, are the true springs of life and salvation opened. Under its bright cloud, and amid its heavenly voices and gracious visitants, set up thy tabernacles. There thou shalt drink in, with every breath, the joy, and freshness, and strength, of the world to come, and shalt feel thyself borne upwards as by a thousand hands in celestial sympathy with thy transfigured Head.

Transform each sinful feature,  
Lord Jesus, by thy grace,  
Since thou, for such a creature,  
Did'st mar thy blessed face.  
Grace shall my bonds dis sever,  
Roll from my grave the stone,  
And make me free for ever,  
In fealty to thy throne. Amen.

## IX.—AHAB'S REPENTANCE.

The Scripture, my friends, as you well know, speaks repeatedly of a *Book of Life*; and the apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Philippians, iv. 3, speaks of the names of his fellow-labourer Clement and others, as written in that book. What kind of book then is this? You all know, that when we wish to ascertain the nature of an earthly book, we learn its title, its contents, its author, its object, and also the persons for whom it is written; and if we follow out these inquiries respecting this book, we shall be abundantly satisfied. The title of the book is the *Book of Life*; a delightful and promising title, which excites in us no fear but this, that our own names may not perhaps stand in it. It contains no judgments; it records no sentences of death. It is full of the promise of life eternal: those whose names are written in it cannot die. They fall asleep in Jesus, and awake to newness of life; everlasting youth awaits them beyond death and the grave; and thrones of unfading glory and joy stand prepared for them in heaven. This *Book of Life* is not an ordinary book written on perishable materials, and with dead letters. It is like the book of memory in which we treasure up the looks of our dearest friends, and the sacred images of the never-to-be-forgotten dead. It is a book of the heart, written in the living letters of love. Yea, it is the very heart of our Almighty Father in heaven. In this book are inscribed a multitude of names that no man can number, which are all individually before the Lord at all times, and are to him unspeakably dear and not to be forgotten. They are the names of his people, his chosen, his children, his heirs, written in the blood of his Son, by whom they are redeemed. For his sake alone are these names transferred from the roll of the condemned to the *Book of Life*; and in the light of his great name do they all shine in the record of the Divine heart. This book is open in heaven. It is there read over and over, and its

interest is never exhausted. It is the favourite book of the glorified Saviour, who sees in it the trophies of his power and grace, the pearls of his treasure, the jewels of his crown. This book indicates to the good Shepherd his sheep; to the bridegroom, his bride; to the High Priest, his redeemed; to the Prince of Peace, the subjects of his gracious love. Even to the holy angels is this book opened. They are sent forth to minister unto them who shall be heirs of salvation, and so they must know the names that are written in this book; and day and night do these hosts gather around this wonderful book, and they turn over and read, and read again, and strike their hands together in astonishment. They read there the names of Rachab, and Mary Magdalene, and the thief on the cross, and the publican, and all the names of the chief of sinners; and ever as they read, they fall down in adoration, and pour forth their wonder in songs of rapture to God, and to the Lamb.

Now, if there be any object in the world worthy of our curiosity, I am sure we will agree in saying what it is. Does my name stand in the book of life, or does it not? This is, beyond all controversy, the most serious, weighty, and momentous question that can rise up in a human heart. On the decision of this question hangs my whole peace, my happiness in time and in eternity. If our names are there, then hallelujah! from henceforth may all generations call us blessed! If they are not, then woe unto us! it had been better for us that we had never been born.

Do you ask, now, in what way it is possible to ascertain on earth whether our names are written in heaven? I answer, that every one whose name is thus written, is already marked out from others by God, and the Scripture tell us what these marks of an heir of glory are; the chief of these is a contrite spirit, a heart that longs after God. There are, however, two ways of crying for mercy, and it is not every humbling of the soul before God, that warrants thy conclusion, that thy name is written in the

Book of Life. Therefore, deceive not thyself. But if thou wilt seriously know in what the false humiliation differs from that which is the fruit of grace, the portion of sacred history before us will make the distinction abundantly clear.

· 1 KINGS xxi. 22—29.

“ And will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked me to anger, and made Israel to sin. And of Jezebel also spake the Lord, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat. But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up. And he did very abominably in following idols, according to all things as did the Amorites, whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel. And it came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly. And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days; but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house.”

Elijah delivers his message in Naboth's vineyard, and announces to the tyrant, with all boldness, the dreadful judgments that should overtake himself and his family. We have to consider the impression which this denunciation made on the guilty monarch; and in speaking of his repentance shall notice, I. How his repentance was called forth. II. What kind of repentance it was. III. What were its consequences.

I. The terror which we see taking possession of Ahab's mind, was the effect of Elijah's message. The awful nature of that message produced also some humiliation of his guilty soul at the footstool of God. Nor does this surprise us, for it contained not only a Divine accusation against the king, but also the sentence of the tribunal of the Most High.

A threefold crime is laid to his charge; that he had provoked God to anger, made Israel to sin, and sold himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord. For this

cause, the sword of the Almighty was already whetted for the destruction of himself and his house.

Observe, then, how Jehovah is represented in the first part of the accusation, as a God who may be provoked by continued insults of his creatures, and whose long-suffering is like a bended bow, which must not be drawn beyond a certain point, otherwise it will break. This certainly sounds very like the manner of men ; but faith is so far from stumbling at such human representations of God, that she rather finds in them a source of help and satisfaction. Such a God as this it is we stand in need of ; a living God apprehensible by minds like ours ; a God with every spiritual element of our own nature, intelligence, affection, and desire. A God enthroned on inaccessible heights, far withdrawn from us amid the abysses of eternity, and so remote from all human thoughts, as to be unmindful alike of our praises and our blasphemies ; such a God would be no God to us. There would be an impassable gulf between us and our God ; but faith will be satisfied with nothing but union and communion with him. All God's revelations of himself, therefore, which are coloured with human feeling, are dear to faith ; and even where Jehovah declares, that he is displeased, is grieved, is provoked to anger, when a creature denies him the glory due unto his name ; even there faith does not stumble, but finds something consolatory and suited to its wants.

Ahab is farther accused of having made Israel to sin. He had done so by his ungodly example, as well as by the infamous decrees which had made the worship of Baal the religion of the state, and exposed the children of God to the most bloody persecutions. Woe unto those, who, like Ahab, are not satisfied with destroying their own souls, but who make it a matter of anxiety and trouble to poison others with the infection of error and sin, and to sink them in their own ruin. Such men will one day have to bear, not only the burden of their own iniquity, but the guilt, besides, of all the unhappy victims who were ensnared by their arts of seduction ; amid whose vindic-

tive execrations they shall suffer a double damnation, and in which there will be nothing to comfort them, but the thought, that, by their destruction of souls, they have made themselves so much liker the image of their father the devil, than those who are come with them to the same place of torment.

The third accusation which Elijah brought against Ahab, was, that he "had sold himself to work evil in the sight of the Lord." Nay, adds the sacred historian, "there was none like unto Ahab, whom Jezebel, his wife, stirred up." Sold to work evil! Horrid delusion! and yet, there is no man in an unconverted state to whom it does not apply with fearful truth. "I am carnal," says Paul, with reference to his natural condition, "sold under sin; for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I." Try the experiment only for a single day with the law of God; labour to keep in the spirit any one command of God; and, however it may mortify you, you will find yourself compelled, before evening, to subscribe to the humbling confession of the apostle, and make it your own.

It is a common proverb, that, "Every man has his price, for which he is willing to sell himself." Horrible as this sounds, it is perfectly true of the natural man. For some stipulated amount or other, be it payable in gold, or honours, or pleasures, the proud son of the earth may be bargained for like a piece of merchandise, and hired to any debasing or wicked service. The price of king Ahab, as we know already, was a woman's favour. The affection of Jezebel was the idol to which he sacrificed everything. She had but to say the word and Ahab was ready to lay, not only his own will, his honour, and the peace of his conscience, but also the salvation of his soul, if, indeed, he had any, and the favour of heaven, when he possessed it, at her feet. Would that he were singular in this infatuation, this cheap and easy barter of his immortal soul! But such miserable bargains are no strange madness among us. Alas, let many a one ask himself, why he is an unbeliever, why he despises the people of God?

why he is the slave of the world and the devil, and tries to resist every good impression? However humbling to his pride, he must reply, "I am bound; I cannot act otherwise." And in what manner bound? By human custom and example, by worldly connexion, by favour, by attachment; all of which involve a tacit understanding, that the enjoyment of them must be purchased by the surrender of moral freedom and independence, and that every holier principle, nay, the immortal interests of the soul must be sacrificed to their claims. Fatal connexions! accursed bonds of friendship! Rather let us have strife and discord among very friends, than such a compromise, such a harmony as this! He that has hitherto walked in such claims, let him rend them asunder without delay, and bow his head no longer to the impious yoke. "He that loveth father, or mother, or son, or daughter, more than me, is not worthy of me." Remember the blessing of Moses upon Levi, "Who said unto his father, and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor know his own children; for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant. They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law; they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt-sacrifices upon thine altar." Deut. xxxiii. 9, 10. "Ye are bought with a price," says the apostle, "therefore be not ye the servants of men."

The heavy accusations which Elijah, in God's name, brought against Ahab in the vineyard of Naboth, must have been the more terrific, from the tremendous threatenings with which they were followed. The first of these was, "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine." This appalling denunciation was literally fulfilled. For soon afterwards Ahab, from motives of pure ambition, proclaimed a war against the Syrians, contrary to the express command of God, and in spite of the warning of Micaiah the prophet, "If thou return at all in peace, the Lord hath not spoken by me." And he returned not. In the very first battle the avenging hand of God smote him. A certain man drew a

bow at a venture, but the Lord directed the arrow, and it smote him between the joints of the harness ; wherefore, he said unto the driver of his chariot, " Turn thine hand, and carry me out of the host, for I am wounded ; " and so it was done ; and the king died at even ; and the blood of his wound ran down into the midst of the royal chariot ; and they carried him to Samaria and buried him there. And as they washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria, the very place where Naboth was murdered, the dogs licked up his blood. Verily, there is a God that judgeth in the earth ! Lord Jesus have mercy upon us !

The next curse of the Lord was upon the *house* of Ahab. " Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity, and will cut off from Ahab every male, and him that is shut up and left in Israel. And will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah. Him that dieth of Ahab in the city shall the dogs eat ; and him that dieth in the field the fowls of the air shall eat." How awful is sin when the iniquities of the fathers are thus visited upon the children, to the third and fourth generation. Of this threatening, not one word failed, as you may see in 2 Kings chap. ix. Jehu was the Divine instrument in this execution, after he had first been anointed king over Israel. He lost no time in bringing the kingdom under his authority, and his first march was against Jezreel, where king Joram, the son of Ahab, resided. When Joram heard of the approach of the hostile force, he went out in his chariot to meet it, and bring matters to a peaceful settlement. Having met Jehu in the portion of Naboth the Jezreelite, he asked, Is it peace ? To whom Jehu replied, What peace so long as the whoredom of thy mother Jezebel, and her witchcrafts, are so many. Joram, hearing this, endeavoured to escape ; but Jehu drew a bow with all his strength, and smote Joram between his arms, and he sank down in his chariot. Then said Jehu to Tidkar his captain, " Take him up and cast him in the portion of the field of Naboth the Jezreelite, according



to the word of the Lord." And it was done. There Ahab's blood flowed according to the letter of the Divine threatening, from the veins of his son, on the very ground which had been dyed with the blood of the innocent Naboth. In like manner were all Joram's sons, and all the relatives of Ahab, cut off by the sword, so that neither root nor branch remained of that idolatrous house. The idol priests met with the same fate. In one day they were all slain with the sword, the images, together with the temple of Baal, in Samaria, broken to pieces, and idol-worship for a season extirpated in Israel.

The third judgment which Elijah announced to Ahab, was to fall upon Jezebel. "The dogs," said he, "shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel." And so it came to pass. For when Jehu came to Jezreel, and the queen heard of it, "She painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out at a window." But the infamous woman did not succeed this time with her meretricious arts; the heart of the rude captain remained unmoved and insensible as a rock. He looked up, and called to the chamberlains who stood near her, "Throw her down;" and they threw her down, so that the wall and horses were besprinkled with her blood, and she was trodden down like the mire in the streets. And after Jehu had eaten and drank, he said, "Go, see now this cursed woman, and bury her, for she is a king's daughter." But when they came, "they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands." And they that were sent returned to Jehu and told him. Then said Jehu, "This is the word of the Lord, which he spake by his servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, In the suburbs of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel; and the carcase of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field in the suburbs of Jezreel, so that they shall not say, This is Jezebel!"

Behold, my brethren, how the Lord fulfils his word! Great God! what fear and trembling should overtake all impenitent sinners; for he that has threatened them with

hell and everlasting death, is the self-same God ; his name is FAITHFUL and TRUE ; and it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than for one tittle of his word to fail !

II. The thunder of Elijah's denunciations did not this time at least fail of effect. Ahab knew whom he had before him, and that it was not this man's custom to beat the air, and utter empty sounds ; and so he stands thunder-struck, confounded, and utterly overwhelmed. His knees totter, his bones tremble, a quiver of strange horror thrills through his soul. He cannot but confess that these awful judgments are deserved. He feels the enormous burden of his guilt. His conscience awakes in avenging strength, and past iniquities rise up in terrific array around him. He feels as if the ghost of the murdered Naboth stood before him in ghastliness and blood ; as if he heard from the graves of slaughtered saints a thousand-fold cry rise to heaven for vengeance ; as if the lightnings of Divine wrath glanced already around his guilty head ; as if the fearful howl were even now behind him of dogs panting for his blood. The impression which had overpowered him at the fiery sign on Carmel, awakes in all its freshness with a thousand horrors. He now knows too well that Jehovah is God, and that Elijah is his minister. The poor terror-stricken mortal sinks down as if he stood already before the judgment-seat of the Eternal, and heard the thunder of Divine rebuke roll over his head, and saw the angels of justice gathering round to carry off the apostate, who gave honour to Baal, to the place of execution. He forgets his crown and his purple, and with all the pride of regal dignity and state lost and swallowed up for the moment in the overwhelming consciousness of guilt, he is restrained by no shame from appearing before God and man as a miserable and burdened sinner. He descends into the dust, rends his clothes in token of a heart torn by remorse, puts on sackcloth, falls down before the God of Elijah, and pours forth his distress at his footstool. He appoints a fast, unconcerned whether it please his hea-

then consort or not, continues his exercises of repentance through whole nights, exchanging his couch of state for a bed of sackcloth, and goes softly and sorrowfully for a season, a picture of undissembled woe. Joy is mute in the palace, formerly so full of unhallowed mirth ; the music, pipe, and viol no longer resound through the glittering halls of state ; the royal dwelling is like a house of death and mourning, and the gloom of the king spreads itself like a black cloud over all his attendants.

The mourning of the king of Samaria was not a false show. The outward garb of distress in which he appeared was a true expression of his inward temper and feelings. Nevertheless, his repentance wanted much to make it a repentance unto life and salvation. It was not a contrition like that of Mary Magdalene, of the poor publican, or the thief on the cross. Ahab's repentance was destitute of *love* ; and it is love which first gives our acts and deeds a true holiness, and a worth in the sight of God.

Let us take occasion, from the example of Ahab, to explain briefly the nature of true repentance. The apostle Paul points out its essential character when he says, Gal. ii. 19, " For I, through the law, am dead to the law, that I might live unto God." By the *law* to which he is dead, is to be understood here, the sum of the Divine demands on man, together with the threatenings and curses annexed to it ; or in one word, what we commonly call the *moral law*. Now the apostle says of himself, that he has not escaped from this schoolmaster as a truant, or a deserter like others ; but that he is *dead* to it, and thereby delivered from it, not only to the completest extent but also in the legal way ; even as a woman, whose husband is dead, is free from her engagement to him, and may contract a new marriage. Every man, whether he will acknowledge it or not, stands in a peculiar relation to the law ; in a relation exactly like that of a subject to his sovereign, or a servant to his master. His duty is to obey the law ; if he does so, the law rewards him ; if he does not, it visits him with its curse. Now, so soon as the law

makes its right to command distinctly felt in the conscience of any man, the relation of taskmaster and servant comes into force, and now is alive. The man feels his obligation to the law, and sees it to be a very urgent necessity of his case to come to terms, and be on a safe footing with this law, which stands before him with its commands, threatenings, and curses. Up to this point then both are *alive*, the law and the man who is under its authority. The marriage-compact, ratified by God, is still in full force, and the sentence due to the breaker of it, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law," maintains all its power and rigour. The consequence is truly alarming; and the first thing which the man commonly does to escape it, is to satisfy the law in the way of obedience, or by doing the works of the law. He is still alive; and has, in his own estimation, strength and ability enough to carry out his purpose. He gives himself, therefore, to the work; he comes under the law; and here he sets his foot upon a path from which no one ever brought any thing back but broken bones, a wounded heart, and a distressed conscience. Alas, what must he now experience! Instead of coming forth from the mire of sin, he daily sinks deeper in it; instead of going forwards in the way of obedience, he hourly goes backwards. His best resolutions are ruined by his own inability; and the deplorable conviction, that he is a thousand times more corrupt than he had ever supposed, together with the deeper feeling of the curse that gnaws into his conscience, and the vexation, anguish, trouble, and despondency, that, according to the word of God, the law works in all that are bold enough to encounter it in their own strength,—this is the whole fruit,—the harvest of sorrow,—that the sinner reaps from his self-righteous endeavours. What then is he to try next? Perfect obedience is now out of the question, so he renounces all hope from it, and seeks to put himself right with the law in another fashion. But how? He resolves to flee from the law—he turns deserter. Now, thinks he,

with the boldness of desperation, why should I torment myself longer upon a path where my most honest efforts have totally failed of success? and with this desperate thought, he yields himself up once more to his sinful ways, gives the reins once more to his flesh, and follows every lust of his depraved heart. But let him forsake the law as he will, the law will not forsake him. It pursues him,—haunts him,—tracks all his guilty retreats, and startles him, now in this sinful indulgence, and now in that, with its pealing thunders and its muttered curses; for it is in truth lodged in his own conscience, and how can he flee from himself? What is he now to do? One way stands still open to him. He will now capitulate with the law, and save himself by a favourable compromise. “I will observe thee,” says he, “as well as I can, and strive to answer thy demands, *as far as lies in my power*; only thou must then cease thy dreadful curses, and grant me the indulgence of making up any deficiency, and comforting myself with the mercy of God.” Reasonable, however, as this may seem to him, it succeeds no better; the law disdains to accept any partial fulfilment. It absolutely demands a perfect obedience; and let the sinner do the utmost he can to satisfy it, the law does not at all lower its tone of malediction, or plant one sting less in the conscience. Hence the poor forlorn sinner must now give up his last hope; he feels that there is no other course left him but to plead guilty at once before the bar of God, to confess that the law is just in its demands and threatenings, to declare his own moral bankruptcy, and exclaim with the apostle, “O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death.” Nature, indeed, strives mightily against this sentence of self-condemnation,—trembles to sacrifice her last desperate hope,—and recoils from a death by her own hands. But what avails this sad reluctance? Light shines overwhelmingly into her darkness. As a captive, pierced with a thousand arrows, the convinced soul sinks before the foot of the throne of God, and in the extremity of distress, confusion, and amaze-

ment, utters the exceeding bitter cry, "Woe is me, for I am undone!"

When a sinner, then, has been brought thus far to pronounce on himself the sentence of death with sincere and unaffected distress, is the process which the apostle calls "dying to the law" then completed? Far from it; otherwise Cain and Judas might have said, with Paul, that they were dead to the law. There has certainly one kind of *dying* taken place; the sinner is dead to his fancied self-righteousness,—dead, also, to his own ability to keep the law. But that repentance which the Scripture styles a godly sorrow unto salvation, needing not to be repented of, is not, therefore, necessarily as yet produced. Paul, no doubt, calls this sense of absolute impotence, *a dying*; for he says in Rom. vii., "When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death." This is dying *under* the law, and *by* the law; but it is not dying *to* the law. The sinner whom we formerly described, is dead to his fancied moral excellencies; but the marriage between him and the law is not yet dissolved. On the contrary, this severe husband and schoolmaster makes him cruelly feel his bondage, continues the torture of the scourge, and often drives him by his rigours to the verge of despair; and all this time there remains in the breast of the sinner his enmity to the law, and, consequently, to the Author of the law. His whole nature murmurs and grudges at it; he is vexed and irritated that the law exists; he cannot be subject to it; he would gladly see it destroyed, because it robs him of his peace, and puts a strong curb on his sinful flesh. But, so long as this is the case, his repentance is not of the right kind; that Divine change, which we call *regeneration*, has not yet taken place, and that dying *to* the law, of which Paul speaks, is yet to come.

Now, this glorious and blessed death comes not by the ministry of condemnation, but by a better law. "I," says the apostle, "am dead by the law to the law." This law

by which he died is, without doubt, the "law of the Spirit of life," of which he says in Rom. viii. 2, "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." And this "law of the Spirit of life" is no other than *the gospel*, whereby alone it is that true, divine, and saving repentance is called forth. Let us consider once more the case of the awakened sinner, whom we left at the bar of Divine justice, trembling and almost on the verge of despair. His heart is as much opposed to the law as ever; and the distress of his conscience forbids him to lift up his eyes to the Lord. But lo! the Sun of the New Testament casts its first rays into his darkness; the cross appears amid the clouds of his distress; the glad-tidings of the gospel are sounded in his ears; and find a way, opened by the Spirit, into his heart. And now mark the wonderful change that takes place in his whole being! He hears that there is help and redemption for him; he hears that the Father has sent his only begotten Son into the world for his salvation; he hears that this Holy One has taken his sins upon himself; he hears that He has paid the debt, suffered the deserved punishment, endured the wrath of God in the sinner's stead, and is gone to prepare for him a place in the kingdom of everlasting glory. The sinner hears of it, is startled, is amazed, scarcely believes for joy—looks at his Surety, beholds his wounds—his head crowned with thorns—his countenance beaming with infinite love—and his heart, his holy, compassionate, pierced, and bleeding heart! Then, indeed, he knows not what to think of it, and can scarcely yet believe his eyes and ears. Ah, what feelings spring up within him, under the beams of such love and kindness! He falls with bursting heart at the feet of his Divine Deliverer, and pours forth floods of tears! Ah, these are tears no longer wrung from him by despair, but flowing from the deepest fountain of love. For servile fear, there has come to be a child-like reverence and humility; for the trembling of guilt, a deep and holy shame, in which the bitterness of remorse is past. Enmity to the law has

now departed from his heart ; for how should he hate a law that is no longer formidable,—a law that neither irritates, nor depresses, nor condemns ? His enmity to the law is changed into love ; for it is the expression of the will of him, to whose mercy he owes his whole salvation. He now, therefore, delights in the law, and flees from sin as from a serpent. He flees from it, not from outward compulsion, but inward impulsions,—not from fear of punishment, but from love to that Holy Saviour, whom it is his supreme desire to obey, and to whose glory he dedicates himself with his whole heart. This, then, is true and godly repentance unto life ; repentance springing from the first love of the gospel, and always attended with faith. A wonderful death has now taken place. The ruinous alliance between the sinner and the law is dissolved, and that lawfully. The law now leaves him in peace ; for the believer in Christ is made “ the righteousness of God in him,” and even the demands of the law are changed in their character ; for what it commands is now nothing more than the fruit which the good tree, out of an inward principle of life, would produce of itself.

Of a repentance so glorious as this, we see no traces in the sorrow of Ahab. The enmity to the law was not abolished in his mind, and slain by faith and love. The penalty of sin made him tremble, not the sin itself. Had the law denounced no curse against him, his transgressions would have cost him but little pain. Nay, because the punishment lingered, he turned back into the path of destruction, and thereby afforded the most undoubted evidence that his sorrow was no more than the fruit of selfish fear, and that the dominion and love of sin were not destroyed within him.

III. But though Ahab's repentance was far from genuine, this did not prevent the Almighty, at whose feet he humbled himself, from regarding it with some favour. He sent, therefore, his word to Elijah the Tishbite, and said to him, “ Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before



me? Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days; but in his son's days will I bring the evil on his house." Here there was a delay of execution, but no recall or reversal of judgment. The curse still rested upon Ahab and his house. But even this mark of Divine respect to a repentance that had so little intrinsic worth, this exemption of Ahab from experiencing in his own life the violence of all the impending storms, was an act of great condescension and grace. But you ask, why did the Lord shew this regard to a humiliation so little deserving of it? I answer, he did so to impress this truth deeply, by a living example, on the king and all who witnessed his grief and dejection, that self-abasement before his throne is the way to escape his judgments, and obtain his favour. We are to look upon it as an encouragement to Ahab to proceed in the right direction, just as the first promising attempt of a novice in any art, however defective it may be, is greeted with cheering approval. This was the first step which, though it did not lead from death unto life, prepared the way for those which did so. We must be careful, however, of supposing it a certain mark of our state of grace, that we at any time of our life experience the like forbearance of God on humbling ourselves before him, that he vouchsafes a signal answer to our cry of distress, and in consequence of our regrets and confessions, rolls away some of the heavy clouds that hang over us. This was, perhaps, nothing more than an encouragement of the first defective attempts of the novice in the school of repentance; but by no means a distinct proof that our prayer and humiliation were the fruit of godly sorrow, or that we were restored to the favour of God. All history teaches us, that whenever a king or people have given glory to the King of kings, even by outward appearance, this confession has been crowned with signal blessings from God; but he that should thence infer that these nations and princes were especial objects of God's favour, would often find himself premature in his conclusions. There are men among ourselves also,

whom we dare not regard as regenerated persons, who, notwithstanding, take their stand on the side of gospel truth, and maintain a certain form of devotion, with prayer and humiliation, before the Most High, and are influenced by some fear of the Divine displeasure, and are capable of an apparently lively interest in the concerns of Christ's kingdom. We find, accordingly, that God blesses their house, and prospers their outward lot, so that they acquire the respect and esteem of all well-disposed men, and enjoy, amid general goodwill, the abundant supplies of this world's good. But God forbid that these men should conclude from this state of things, that they really belong to the number of the saints of God, and have entered into the congregation of the righteous. How fatal would such a conclusion be ! No, God blesses them only in his wise providence, though they have little more than a name to live, in order to make of them living examples to others, that he will not be backward to acknowledge the smallest approach to his service, and that the outward fruits of godliness are prosperity and honour. He makes use of them as instruments for his own glorious purposes, and not to seal their assurance of adoption. Let none of you, my brethren, deceive himself ; for "except ye be born again, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." And if ye are not born again, it will be said of you, as of Ahab, "Seest thou how they humble themselves before me ? Because they humble themselves before me, I will not bring evil upon them in their lifetime." But that day shall at the last take them unawares as a thief, and the voice of judgment shall startle them, "I know you not, whence ye are. I never knew you ; depart from me, ye workers of iniquity."

As many of you, my brethren, as are still "without," are in a situation similar to that of Ahab in the field of Naboth. Awful curses have been denounced against you, dark clouds of judgment hang over your heads ; in these clouds sleeps the thunder, and it will awake the lightning, and it shall strike you through suddenly. One way of

escape is still open, but one ; self-condemnation and self-renunciation ! Not that these things have any value in God's sight of themselves, but they speak the felt need of a better righteousness, and that need shall be supplied by the righteousness of God. As soon as you stretch out the hand of faith in the hour of trouble to lay hold on this, the instruments of death are cast aside, the terrors of the curse are hushed, the decree of grace goes forth from the eternal throne, and the rainbow of the covenant overspans your heaven with its glorious promise, " I will no more be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee."

Here we take leave of king Ahab. Let his example be, and remain to us, an awful warning, that a sinner, after the most remarkable visitations of God, the strongest allurements, the liveliest emotions, yea, after a struggle of repentance, and a wonderful answer to his prayers, may yet come short and be lost for ever. O, may our repentance be better than that of Ahab, else we may look forward to a more fearful repentance still, when it is too late ! Yes, when the hour is come, in which the axe is laid to the root of the tree, and as it falls it must lie for ever, when hope is over and retreat cut off by a " great gulf fixed," and the world has fled with all but the memory of its sins, and the dark prison-house of eternity is opening wide—then repentance will overtake you. But O, what repentance ! not unto life, but unto death ! Alas, how many among you, whose " neck is as iron," " and whose brow is as brass," shall quiver with strange fear, and hide yourselves in the holes and clefts of the rocks, and call on the mountains to fall on you and cover you from the wrath of the Lamb ; and ever and anon shall burst forth the groan of anguish, and the piteous cry, " My poor, poor soul ! Undone ! Undone !" And who shall comfort you, since all holy beings see that your repentance is no godly repentance, no mourning for spiritual ruin, no grief for the loss of righteousness, no sighing and longing after the love and communion of God ; but a shudder of suffering nature, a trembling of despair, such as devils feel, a

cowering before the Most High, such as the evil spirits confessed when they felt the conqueror of Satan near, a struggle to escape from themselves and God, such as the demons felt when they prayed him not to command them away into the deep. God be merciful to us, dear brethren, and grant us that repentance unto salvation that needeth not to be repented of. Let our repentance be like that of the weeping child, which can have no peace till the eye of the offended parent again rest on it in love; like that of the grieving Magdalene, who sunk at the Saviour's feet, and would not go till He spoke the words of pardon. Let love be the soul of it, and faith its guiding light, and a thorough breach with the kingdom of darkness its first movement, and an entire surrender to the Lord, the seal of its security. Then shall our tears be numbered in heaven, and call forth a joy among the angels; and the Lord himself shall stretch forth both hands and wipe them away, and give us the first pledge and seal of our adoption, in the sacred sadness that remains behind.

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#### X.—THE JOURNEY TO EKRON.

“But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; thou hast been weary of me, O Israel.” Isa. xliii. 22. I hardly know a more affecting expression than this. It is the mournful complaint of a neglected and disregarded friend. And who is this ill-requited, this complaining friend? It is He who is love itself; it is the God of tender compassion, the Saviour of sinners. And must he thus complain? Ah, who has such sad reason! If there be on earth one that is forgotten, disregarded, or mistaken, adorable Friend of sinners, it is thou! Yea, does not all the world appear to have conspired to blot out his remembrance? The church, which is called by his name, for the greater part rejects him. Over the doors of many of our Christian sanctuaries might be written the words, “Why seek ye the living among the dead?” The pastors of his flock, in great numbers, refuse to hear his voice. The seal of the

Lamb is, in the profane language of the day, a brand of infamy. Politeness forbids even the mention of his name ; social life has cast out the Lord of glory as the disturber of its peace ; Science scarcely deigns a serious notice of Him more ; Art consecrates its colours and its tones to other gods, and most of the writings and books which circulate through the world, cry out, " I know not the man," and are moved by no cock-crow to repentance.

There is ground, then, for the mournful complaint of the Holy One of Israel, " Thou hast not called upon me ; thou hast been weary of me." Who will doubt that he has a right to make this complaint, and a perfect claim to our affectionate remembrance ! Behold, he stands before thee a man of unparalleled sorrows, his bleeding head crowned with thorns ; his sacred form marred by innumerable wounds. Methinks thou shouldst know by this time the meaning of the strange sight ! His look was once far otherwise. He was in the bosom of the Father, in the form of God ; and the glory which he had with the Father, before the world was, left him in no need of thy poor service or of mine. But in his heart there kindled of itself the flame of sacrifice, the free love of sinners ; and for this he chose no longer to be alone, no longer to dwell apart in his own infinity, but to form the head of a sacred body ; and, be astonished, ye heavens ! to complete himself through us ! Yes, sinner, that he might become thy brother, and unite thee with himself in his glory, he united himself with thee in thy death. Thy sins he took upon himself in judgment, to lay his virtues upon thee ; and bowed beneath thy curse in death, to serve thee heir to his wondrous merits. Behold, this has he done for us ! What thinkest thou then ? Does he ask too much in the remonstrance, " Thou hast not called upon me." And this is still the soft language of wounded love ! Surely it goes deeper to the heart than the sword of vengeance !

The touching complaint is addressed to all of us. Would that it found a ready ear and an open heart ! Say, my brother, didst thou once know him, or stand near him, as

if thou wert his friend ; and dost thou now care to know him no more ? Ah, look upward ; his eye of love is still upon thee, thou backsliding child, and its look is sad and painful. Hast thou once lain at his feet, and dost thou now play the traitor with the world ? Hast thou taken from his hands the bread of life, and art thou now returned to the husks of the prodigal ? Ah, turn not away from his eye. It seems to ask thee, “ Knowest thou me ? ” It seems to implore thee, “ Be not weary of me.” Return, thou faithless one, to his embrace, and let thy soul dissolve in tears of penitence ! Think what he has done for thee, from thy youth up ; how the buckler of his faithfulness has shielded thee, and how his strong hand has drawn thee often forth from the fearful pit and the miry clay. There was a time when all this seemed to thee from the Lord ; is that time forgotten, and with it the Lord himself ? If so, thy memory is false and treacherous compared with his. For behold he still stands before thee, and his language is, “ Be not weary of me ! ” O regard this petition of forgiving and inviting love ! O smite upon thy breast, and say, “ God be merciful to me a sinner ! If I forget thee, may my right hand forget its cunning ! ” O, be not deaf to the call of the most condescending, the most amazing love. It is the Creator of all things pleading with the creature ; the supremely good and holy Being with the sinner. Who can fathom this depth ! Let us believe that, however astonishing, it is yet true ; and our hearts will surely be grieved for ever, and live to God in Christ Jesus. May the lesson of this day open up to us still farther this strange mystery of love, and bring our souls more deeply under its almighty influence.

2 KINGS i. 2—4.

“ And Ahaziah fell down through a lattice in his upper chamber that was in Samaria, and was sick : and he sent messengers, and said unto them, Go, enquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron whether I shall recover of this disease ? But the angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite, Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say unto them, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to enquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron ? Now, therefore, thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die. And Elijah departed.”

This narrative may lead us to many serious reflections. May the Lord accompany it with his blessing. We shall consider, I. The application to Ekron. II. The Divine jealousy. III. None but Jesus.

I. The kingdom of Israel is now passed into other hands. Ahab has fallen by the stroke of the Lord, and the throne is filled by his son Ahaziah, a worthless prince, who did only evil in the sight of the Lord, walking in the ways of his father and mother, and causing Israel to sin. He served Baal and worshipped him, and provoked the Lord God of Israel to anger, as his father Ahab had done. The Almighty, therefore, could not return the sword of vengeance to its scabbard. The first heavy stroke on Ahaziah was an invasion of the Moabites. For a long period this people had been tributary to the kings of Israel; but they now revolted, and recovered their independence by force. Another visitation which Ahaziah experienced, is related in the narrative before us. Standing one day on a balcony of his palace, the balustrade on which he leaned suddenly gave way. The king was severely injured by the fall, and "was sick."

Ahaziah lies then on a bed of pain; but, alas, we behold in him the same state of mind that so many shew who come within our own observation. It is a spectacle far from cheering, and furnishes another sad proof of the truth, that the sharpest stings of outward trial are unable to pierce the hardened heart of the sinner; and that the power which converts the soul lies not in outward calamities and distresses, but solely in the mercy of God, and the victorious operations of his almighty grace. What had been wanting to Ahaziah in his father's life-time, that might have been thought likely to lead him to repentance! How remarkably had the Almighty revealed himself anew in Israel; and what overwhelming proofs had he given of his severity and jealousy! All this must have been fresh in Ahaziah's mind; yet he acts as if such great realities, with the fearful end of his own father, had been no more

in his sight than the fleeting images of a dream ; and, instead of humbling himself before the living God, his heart is given to idolatry, and he flees to his gods in the time of trouble. In the Philistine city of Ekron there was an oracle, sacred to the god Baal-zebub, that is, the god of flies, so called either from the plague of flies common in that region being attributed to his displeasure, or from his being honoured as a protector from that plague. This idol was supposed to answer, by his priests, all inquiries respecting the future fortunes and events of life ; and so great was the faith in these responses, that the shrine was a constant resort of pilgrims from other quarters. That the predictions and miracles, that distinguished this oracle, were not the work merely of fraud and priestcraft, but rested on something real, which was produced by infernal influence, is just as little susceptible of doubt, as it is that heathenism in general was supported by the arts of evil spirits, without which it would not have subsisted for half a century. When at last, in the Divine judgment of anti-christ and his kingdom, Satan shall suffer that signal defeat which is predicted in the word of God, it will need no farther proof that it was he who created and upheld idolatry, and that through his magic power, that system of darkness and falsehood received its principal support. No sooner shall heathenism be stripped of this Satanic garb, than it will be as if scales had fallen from the eyes of the blind ; they will be confounded to think that they have adhered for thousands of years to a pure nonentity, and will come from the east and the west to worship the Lord in Zion. The oracle of the idol at Ekron was the first which it occurred to the sick king at Samaria to consult. He assembled his servants about him, to perpetrate by their means an act of impiety, than which none greater could be committed in Israel. “ Go,” said he openly and shamelessly, “ and inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover of this disease.”

The infamous example of Ahaziah cannot be followed in our times in its naked letter, as idol-worship has long



since been banished from the midst of us, and the world is too enlightened to consult the devil in person, having long been disposed to count Satan and hell among the gloomy phantoms of a rude antiquity. And yet, if we examine the matter closely, we shall find that even this philosophic century is full of that heathen leaven, though it is now moulded into a more refined form; and we shall learn by experience, that the rejection of the sure word of prophecy only leads to a new superstition. The presentiment of an invisible world, and the felt need of penetrating into its mysteries, are indelibly impressed on every human heart. But the man who refuses to subject this longing curiosity to the dictates of Scripture, and to seek the satisfaction of his desire in Divine revelation, will inevitably fall a prey to the delusions of darkness and imposture. As a counterpart to the oracle of Ekron and of Endor, we have in the present day clairvoyants and somnambulists; instead of the Delphic tripod and the Dodonian oak, we have pretended prophets and fortune-tellers, whose number is greater among the people than is commonly imagined; and, if these are too silly to move us, we have forebodings, presentiments, dreams, &c., to which many trust as the voice of inspiration, and make their peace of mind depend on them. The place of the ancient heathen mysteries is occupied by a set of secret associations, in whose mystic obscurities thousands seek those disclosures which they refuse to receive from the mouth of the living God; and though they can smile with condescending pity on the magical arts of antiquity, they do not despise to make trial of vulgar amulets and charms, which the popular belief endows with strange virtues, and to hope for the cure of diseases from one and another so-called sympathetic remedy. And once more, my friends, when we hear a mother entreating the physician to save her child, and putting all her confidence in his skill, and even taking offence at his pious reference to the Divine blessing, as what alone can make his remedies effectual, is not this the very spirit of Ahaziah? Is it not a running

after idols, an idolatry of secondary causes? But alas! how great is the number of such practical atheists among us; how many are there to whom it has never once occurred as a serious thought, that any thing should be hoped for from the God of Israel, and who, in all their necessities and embarrassments, have no other God than the creature, than dust and ashes! But woe unto those who give unto idols the honour due to God alone! For that the Lord does not regard them with indifference, the sequel of the narrative will make plain to all of us.

II. How then did Ahaziah succeed? He sends to Ekron to consult Baal-zebub; but, instead of the lying response of the idol, he hears the awful thunder of the living God. His messengers are already on their way, when the angel of Jehovah comes to the Tishbite and directs him, saying, "Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say unto them, Is it because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron? Now, therefore, thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shall surely die." It is Christ, the Angel Jehovah, who spake thus to Elijah. Why it was *He*, is not hard to understand. He had the greatest reason to be displeased with Ahaziah's impiety. It was He who sought to be a God for men and among men; and who had done everything to gain the affections of sinners to himself, and to constrain their trust and obedience. From the times of old he had heaped upon Israel all possible proofs of his condescension, favour, and love. Even in the days of the patriarchs he had shewn that his delights were with the sons of men, and that he was ready to guide his chosen people, not only by the Urim and Thummim of the high-priest, but by his own immediate voice and counsel. He had revealed himself as the Lord, "who was ever nigh to all that call upon him in truth," and had so manifested his love to sinners, that it might seem as if he lived only for their sakes; and now we see them refusing to come to

him, and following after the vain idol of Ekron. The offence cried to heaven, and justly provoked him to anger ; and, therefore, he appeared in person to complain of such ingratitude, and to furnish the messengers with the sadly just remonstrance, “ Is it because there is no God in Israel, that ye go to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron ? ”

I can imagine with what difficulty some may be convinced that it was in truth no other than the Eternal God that here appeared to Elijah, and spoke to him as the children of men to each other ; and, no doubt, they never will believe it, till they have learnt to know Him in his deepest humiliation, by the manger and the cross, and in the fulness of that love which made him willing to be despised and rejected of men that he might bring us to glory, and in which he devoted himself to death as the Lamb of God, that he might obtain by his blood eternal redemption for us. He that has once become acquainted with him in these deep humiliations, can look on all other acts of his condescension without astonishment. He who has seen the greater, ceases to be amazed at the less.

And let no one stumble at the fact, that the mighty God appears in our history like the children of men, in being *provoked* at being passed by, while inquiry was made at Ekron. Such a God, and no other is our God, and such he will abide, blessed be his name ! Surely he is not most glorious to us in his unveiled dignity, but in the veil of condescension and love. It is because of the greatness of his love, that he cannot be indifferent how our hearts are affected towards him. He would have his people love him ; and not only so, but he watches over our love to him with a holy jealousy, and seeks to possess it alone, entire, undivided, and exclusive. Yes, his children may well be on their guard against the smallest distraction of their love. He will not suffer it ; but will use severity to those who are as the apple of his eye. He will come with the rod and chastise them, saying, “ Ephraim, what hast thou to do any more with idols ? ” or he will tear

from their embrace the objects that divide their heart with him. For he must have our whole heart, and how blessed shall we be if it is given entire to him "who alone is worthy."

III. And as he desires our love unbroken and entire, so he will not suffer us to find our peace, our confidence, and our strength in any other than himself alone. Immanuel must be our *all in all*. Do you ask what this implies? Gladly do I embrace the present opportunity of bringing this vital subject clearly before your minds. You know the blessing of Moses pronounced on Levi, "Let thy Urim and thy Thummim, O Levi, (thy light and thy righteousness,) be with thy Holy One." Deut. xxxiii. 8. Here you have the answer to your question. The "Holy One" was not Aaron, but Aaron's antitype, Christ, the true High Priest; and Levi is taken for a type of the chosen people of God. So that the blessing of Moses, in its highest sense, is this, "Let thy Urim and Thummim rest and abide for ever with Christ." Now, as the Urim and Thummim, or that square breast-plate set with twelve precious stones, after the number of the tribes of Israel, which the high priest wore, was the distinctive badge of his high-priesthood, the language of Moses is, "Separate not the High-Priesthood from Jesus, leave him in full possession of his glorious office." Not, as if we could by our backsliding suspend the intercessions of our Redeemer for us, or escape from the range of his high-priestly care. But we may sever the high-priesthood from our Lord, by losing our own sense of its need and hallowed influence, and sinfully placing it elsewhere than in Christ. When, after being "known of God," we fall into sin, we are too apt to distrust the Lord's mercy, and lose sight of our great Advocate with the Father. We weep; but the tears are those of servile fear, or mortified self-confidence; we make vows for the future, and approach God in the strength of our own resolutions, rather than the all-sufficient grace of our Surety. This is to take away

the priesthood from Christ, in its peace-speaking power to the conscience, and its strengthening power to the affections and the will ; and against this the warning is directed, " Let thy Urim and Thummim be with thy Holy One."

No complaints are heard more frequently from believers than those which are made over their poor attainments in praying, praising, and thanksgiving. And with these is very naturally connected, the fear that their half-stifled cries cannot pass through the heavens, and find a hearing of God. But how foolish and unbelieving is this conduct ! This is to put the Urim and Thummim on your own breasts, and to come before the Eternal with incense from the censer of your own merits. Do you know so little of the great Advocate who stands day and night before the Father, to receive the weak and broken petitions of his saints as they rise, and to complete them by the addition of his own intercessions ? And do you not know that the blood of Christ, the sufferings and death of Christ, the obedience and righteousness of Christ, the whole sum of the unspeakably precious work of Christ, prays with and for you ? Think, my redeemed brother, that though thou canst utter but three words before God, and only lisp and stammer at the foot of his throne, thy broken voice is that of one whom God loves with the same love with which he regards his only begotten, and on whom he thought from eternity in his lost estate, and reconciled when yet an enemy, by the death of his Son. Hold fast, then, this confidence in prayer. Remember that your High Priest prays with and for you, and that your prayers are accepted in the Beloved. This will give unction to all your petitions, and teach you that spirit of prayer in faith to which nothing is denied.

In the breast-plate of the high priest were twelve of the most precious stones, on which were engraven the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. The resplendent light and glory which thus shone around the names of the chosen people, were emblematic of the beauty and glory of the children of God, which they possess in their true High

Priest. Hence they teach us not to separate our sanctification from Christ, but, in this sense also, to let our Urim and Thummim be with the Holy One. But alas! in how many ways is this all-important rule practically set at nought among professed Christians; nay, how many systems, great and small, are there established in direct defiance of it! The proud child of the dust, in the loftiness of his heart, must have an independent holiness of his own. It is a hereditary disease; but would that the professed sons of God did not retain so many dregs of it. But what do we see? One society of so-called Christians after another, given up to the self-righteous pursuit of the phantom virtue, and even dreaming that they have overtaken and secured it. Others multiply restraints and impose prohibitions, "touch not, taste not, handle not," and profess to have reached, by this ladder of pride, attainments in holiness which they can dispense to others. These are your sticklers for seasons and places of prayer, your devotees by the clock, your sanctuary and Sabbath saints, and well-going people of form, who lay their head on their pillow with a good conscience, when the daily routine of religion has been run over in thought, and all found exact and punctual; these are the vain dreamers whom the gospel arouses not, and who, in outward gestures and mystic quietism, and voluntary austerities, and other similar inventions of will-worship, seek their own glory, and even boast of a complete purification from the least taint of sin. All are deluded by their own self-righteous blindness; all are walking in the same fearful path of error, ignorant alike of the depths of their own depravity and of the holiness of the Most High. Happy those who have learnt that God's glory is the end, and God's grace, through Christ, the means of our holiness! The ground of our hope and confidence is, and must be for ever, the perfection of our Surety, which is ours by pure favour of God. It is the consciousness of being thus complete in Jesus, which is the spring of true Christian virtue, of which the body is humility, the soul is love, and the end and aim

the Divine honour. Resolve, then, to be nothing *in thyself, by thyself, or for thyself*. Say rather with the spiritual poet:—

“ Had I an angel’s holiness,  
I’d lay aside the shining dress,  
And choose my Saviour’s righteousness.”

When it was desired in Israel to learn God’s will and purpose, application was made to the high priest, who, by means of the Urim and Thummim, give the wished-for answer in the name of God. This circumstance may teach us to draw a new lesson from the blessing of Moses. Let us leave our concerns in the hand of Christ, and make not ourselves our counsellors. O ye of little faith, who are still asking the anxious question, “ What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithall shall we be clothed ? ” Consider what you do. Is your High Priest dead, and must ye bear the breast-plate of office yourselves ? Cast your care on Him, and He will keep your mind in perfect peace. Farther, let your light and direction for the future be with him. Be not perplexed by this or that untoward providence. All will come to pass as the great Prophet has long ago predicted. From the watchtower of his prophecies look forth upon the world, and you will have a sure footing amid the turmoil of this distracted age. You will know already the substance of all ephemeral views, for you can now read the book of the world’s history, and understand its sequel and the glorious close. Over the gloomy foreground your eye darts away into the golden distance that lies beyond, and sees the clouds of the present tinged with the rosy dawn of the coming jubilee. Lastly, let our whole wisdom be with Christ. Let us hold fast the sure word of prophecy, and that all the more firmly and valiantly, the more unblushingly the father of lies comes abroad in our day, to drive us from the security of our citadel, and wrest these weapons of Divine temper from our hands. Away with that philosophy and science which are falsely so called, away with the dreams of new revelations, away with the visionaries and inflated enthu-

siasts, whose cry is still, "Spirit and life!" while all the while they desire nothing but a "fair show in the flesh," and who tremble not to lay impious hands on the sacred letter of the written word. "Let that, therefore, abide in you which ye have heard from the beginning." "Keep that which is committed unto you; but shun profane and vain babblings." Yes, let thy light and thy righteousness, thy knowledge, thy counsel, and thy wisdom be with thy Holy One.

As the names of the children of Israel were written on the breast-plate of the high priest, let us remember that Christ bears the names of his children on his heart. They are laid on him by the Father, and his name is laid on them. Hence a blessed community with Christ in his sufferings and glory. Christ is not dead and arisen, and ascended to heaven, and crowned with glory and honour for himself alone, but every believer in him! This is an unspeakably great and sacred mystery. Of this all the apostles were persuaded, in the faith of it they all lived and died, and they have given us their testimony with all solemnity that it is even so. "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live." "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." "Christ is risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept." It was this that called forth the triumphant language, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? it is Christ that died; yea, rather that is risen again, who also maketh intercession for us." "O death, where is thy sting; O grave, where is thy victory?" Let our faith be that of Paul, and we shall equally glory in the High Priest of our profession.

The high priest, as you know, bore the names of the children of Israel on his heart. And so it is upon his heart that Christ bears your names, upon his heart that was wrung with anguish and pierced with the spear for you. Consider the import of this glorious truth, "As my Father hath loved me, so have I loved you." And shall we not then cleave to this compassionate High Priest?



not only in our ultimate attachment to his cause (for if we are truly his, he will hold us fast for ever, amid all our unfaithfulness), but in our constant self-dedication to him, and unbroken enjoyment of his fellowship. Let no felt deadness of heart then, let no spiritual drought, let no seeming rejection of our prayers, awaken in us doubts of his love, or call forth the unbelieving cry, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me." Let us maintain in all circumstances the blessed consciousness of his love, and the joyful and holy calm of spirit which flows from this conviction. Let us look upon ourselves more and more, as our assurance grows with increase of faith and holiness, as bound with all that we are and have to the heart of the great Mediator, and as warranted to commit to him the whole care of our direction, and sanctification, and preservation, unto the day of the Lord. Our great Shepherd, Advocate, and Intercessor, has received the charge of all that the Father has given him, to lose nothing.

Behold, then, my brethren, Him who is, and must be, your all in all. Seeing that he is made of God unto us, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption; to look, however obliquely, to any other quarter for that help which he has provided for us, is a base ingratitude, an insult to his offices, an act of treason against his Majesty. Cursed then be the paths that lead to Endor and to Ekron! halt and lame must the feet be that are found in these ways! There is a God in Israel, who, be astonished ye heavens! stands ready to supply the sinners need with a Divine fulness of help, and righteousness, and salvation! To whom do we owe our love, our confidence, our soul's all, but to Him! O Israel, be dissolved in tears before thy King, and let the words be henceforth graven on thy heart, "Let thy Urim and thy Thummim ever be with thy Holy One."

## XI.—THE PREACHING BY FIRE.

The Life of the Church of God upon earth manifests itself in a threefold activity, in Reformation, in Christian Union, and in Missionary Enterprise. Of this threefold development of life in the true Church, the apostle speaks in Eph. ii. 20—23.

By Reformation, we understand the efforts of the Church to cast out every foreign and unscriptural element that has crept in ; to purify herself from errors, and to build herself upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.

By Union, we understand that vital energy of the Church, whereby she seeks to combine believers more closely together, and to promote more and more their growing up in all things unto him who is the Head. "That," as the apostle says, "the whole building, fitly framed together, may grow into an holy temple in the Lord."

By Missionary activity, it is the effort of the Church to extend her boundaries, to recover new provinces from the prince of darkness, to increase the number of her children, whether from heathen abroad, or practical heathen at home, and to build them together on the same foundation "for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

Wherever, then, the true Church is to be found, she will, in all cases, display this threefold character, although it commonly happens, that some one of these activities is found to predominate over the others. Among us, for example, the Church has much less to do in the way of reformation than elsewhere, for the creed of the majority among us is orthodox, and accordant with Scripture. The Church can therefore with us apply herself all the more to the edification and union of her own members, and to the farther extension of the spiritual fold. But, in general, it may be said of our age, that the reforming activity of the true Church is the predominant one ; her work is to lay the foundation, since the spirit of falsehood has dared to attack the very basis of the Church of Christ.

Elijah stands before us as the greatest reformer of the ancient dispensation. The restoration of idolatrous Israel to the faith of their forefathers, was the work given him to do; and thus the prevailing character of his age was that of reformation. Let us keep this principle steadily in view in the study of his life; we will then be enabled to interpret aright the peculiar character of his measures; and the history which we are now to consider will, among others, lose the aspect of strangeness which it presents to us on its first appearance.

## 2 KINGS i. 5—17.

“ And when the messengers turned back unto him, he said unto them, Why are ye now turned back? And they said unto him, There came a man up to meet us, and said unto us, Go, turn again unto the king that sent you, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that thou sendest to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron? therefore thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die. And he said unto them, What manner of man was he which came up to meet you, and told you these words? And they answered him, He was an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins. And he said, It is Elijah the Tishbite. Then the king sent unto him a captain of fifty with his fifty: and he went up to him; (and, behold, he sat on the top of an hill;) and he spake unto him, Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down. And Elijah answered, and said to the captain of fifty, If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty. Again also he sent unto him another captain of fifty with his fifty: and he answered and said unto him, O man of God, thus hath the king said, Come down quickly. And Elijah answered and said unto them, If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And the fire of God came down from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty. And he sent again a captain of the third fifty with his fifty: and the third captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and besought him, and said unto him, O man of God, I pray thee, let my life and the life of these fifty thy servants, be precious in thy sight. Behold, there came fire down from heaven, and burnt up the two captains of the former fifties with their fifties: therefore let my life now be precious in thy sight. And the angel of the Lord said unto Elijah, Go down with him; be not afraid of him. And he arose, and went down with him unto the king. And he said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Forasmuch as thou hast sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron, (is it not because there is no God in Israel to inquire of his word?) therefore thou shalt not come down off that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die. So he died, according to the word of the Lord which Elijah had spoken.”

Such, my friends, is the end of the narrative which commenced with the mission to Ekron. Our God is a consuming fire. He will not be mocked; and it is a fearful thing to fall into his hands. Let us tarry a little to contemplate this strange contest. Here we have, I. Ahaziah's attempt against Elijah. II. The prophet's victory. III. Ahaziah's complete destruction.

I. The messengers of King Ahaziah are already on their way to execute the impious commission. Throwing the guilt of their enterprise on the head of him who devised it, they pass cheerfully on, and already anticipate the end of their journey. But in such courses we are ever liable to err in our reckoning. The oracle comes ere they dream of it, and from a quarter the farthest from their imaginations. All at once a living barrier stands in their way. A man of high and commanding look suddenly appears before them, clad in a hairy mantle, and his mien as dark and awful as the summit of Sinai with its clouds and thunder. Here is no embattled army, but only a single man, without armour or weapons. But the party stand at once aghast at his appearance, and their train is startled and refuses to proceed. "The Tishbite" is whispered in alarm from mouth to mouth; but ere they gain time to inquire and take counsel, the awful stranger confronts them, and his alarming message breaks on them like a storm. "Is it because there is not a God in Israel, that ye are gone to inquire of Baalzebub, the god of Ekron? Return and tell your master, Thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die." The stranger spoke, and turned and disappeared. Pale and trembling, the messengers gaze on each other, and know not what to say. They had not dreamed of bringing their master so swift an answer, and that too without money and without price. And from whom did the oracle come? They know too well that it comes from a source that could not lie. They have lost all inclination to pursue their journey; they shudder at the thought. The way seems wrapt in

flames of fire, with the pit of Tophet at the further end. One encounter with this terrible man was more than enough; and they would rather have rushed into the bloodiest field of battle than met him once again. They turn about in haste, as if the place were no longer safe, and return in silent consternation to Samaria. Verily, it cannot always be foreseen what one is to encounter in such journeys as to Ekron and Endor! It is a dangerous recourse to turn aside from the word of God, and follow after the lying vanities of superstition and imposture. Many a one, in such presumptuous courses, has found disclosures which made his ears tingle and his heart quake. And many have lost for ever the light of truth, and "been given over to strong delusions to believe a lie." The case of Saul is the great scripture warning against this vain and impious curiosity. You know in this tragic instance, how God himself sent up the prophet Samuel with a message of death; and mixed, with the flagitious sport of the conjuror, a scene of good earnest, which was terrible enough to crush for ever, in all who should hear of it, all vain design to intermeddle with such arts of darkness. "Little children, abide in him;" "If any man draw back," saith the Lord, "my soul shall have no pleasure in him."

II. We return to Samaria. King Ahaziah lies upon his couch, and occupies himself with thinking how far his messengers may be by this time on their way. Suddenly he hears the sound of footsteps, the door of his apartment opens, and the messengers stand before his bed. "How," asks the monarch with no small surprise, "are you returned so soon? What means this?" And, without delay, the messengers relate without reserve all that had befallen them by the way. "There came a man up to meet us, and said unto us, Go, turn again unto the king that sent you, and say unto him, Is it because there is not a God in Israel that thou sendest to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron? therefore thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die." The

king hears and is confounded. But collecting himself, as his amazement changed into rage and exasperation, he inquired, "What manner of man was he which came up to meet you, and told you these words!" "He was a hairy man," answered they, "and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins." This likeness was well-known to the king, "Yes," says he, with an assumed composure, "I thought so; it is Elijah the Tishbite."

The king gives his messengers a sign to retire. "Send me hither one of my captains," he cries with stifled but deep and burning resentment. The captain appears in the sick monarch's chamber, and reads in his master's looks the purport of his commission, "Go with your troop," says he, "seize Elijah the Tishbite and bring him unto me." The captain bows submission and hastens to execute the king's orders. Reflect now on the amazing presumption which the sick monarch here displays! He knows well enough who the man is against whom he is about to employ force. He has witnessed the mighty deeds with which the Lord had accredited this his prophet. He is not ignorant how God hears this man's voice, how this mighty champion has Jehovah upon his side, and how all the heavens' thunders, and lightnings, and flames of vengeance are at his command. Yet all this cannot prevent him from entering the lists with the prophet, and thus declaring war against the King of kings. Thus his impiety infatuates his reason, and the feverish fury of his passion banishes the last vestige of cool reflection. The stubble sets itself in array against the fire, a cloud of vapour defies the storm. Surely the course of nature is here invaded. And it is so. For strong delusion has compassed round his apostate spirit, and the stamp of Satan is already visible in his judicial hardening.

The captain with his fifty has already marched forth, and is not long in finding the enemy. On the summit of a mountain, probably on Carmel, they come in sight of the prophet. There he sat, still and lonely, and lost in sacred meditation. But he sat there like a king on his throne,

secure in his God, and surrounded by an invisible host for a guard. He looks up, and beholds the troop with glittering arms approaching, and guesses at once from whom they have come and what is their errand. But he fears nothing in his strong fortress. He will confront them under the banner of his God, and calmly permits their hostile advance. They come nearer that they may shut their prisoner in ; but the regal dignity of the man, as he rises to meet them, and the majestic repose that is stamped on his countenance impose a restraint on their minds, and make them shrink from laying hands on him. They doubtless had a vivid presentiment of some outburst of ruin, should they dare to seize such a man. The captain is satisfied with declaring, in harsh and insolent words, his master's order, "Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down." The prophet sees the haughty bearing of this officer, aggravated as it was by the conviction that its object was confessed to be a man of God. His soul burns with jealousy for the honour of his God, and, with a faith which could have removed Mount Carmel from its base and cast it into the midst of the sea, he cries out "If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume thee and thy fifty." Scarcely has he spoken, ere the words have flown on high and waked the slumbering fire. The Lord hears, and denies not his amen to prayers which seek his own glory. The sky is filled with a lurid blaze, and from the rent clouds the fire rushes down ; and the captain with his fifty lies dead at the prophet's feet !

When this terrible event is made known to the king, with almost inconceivable madness, he is hardened in his impiety, and becomes so blind from rage, that instead of observing against what power he was really making war, he sends a second captain and his fifty, seemingly more daring and unscrupulous than the first, who finds Elijah still in the same place. He draws near at the head of his troop to the servant of the Lord, and with unparalleled presumption, in sight of the slain around him, addresses him as harshly and scornfully as the former, "O man of

God, thus hath the king said, Come down quickly." "If I be a man of God," answers Elijah the second time, "let fire come down from heaven and consume thee and thy fifty." And the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.

One would have thought that intelligence of this second defeat must have caused a change in Ahaziah's temper, and moved him to seek a truce from this unexampled and ruinous contest. But no. Though he should lose his whole army in the struggle, and sacrifice his crown and kingdom besides, nay, and his life also, he will not yield. He sends forth therefore a third captain with his fifty, and enjoins him to bring the prophet as his prisoner. The captain departs with his company, and already we anticipate with horror the renewal of the wrathful judgment. Elijah still sits in the same place upon the height. He thinks not of flight or of terms of peace with the enemies of his King. He is not afraid of many thousands, for he knows that the army of heaven which surrounds him could lay the whole array of earth's legions in the dust. As now the third captain, at the head of his force, arrives at the mount, and beholds the man of God surrounded by the dead bodies of the slain, he is seized with a feeling of awful reverence, which he in vain endeavours to overcome. He feels that he is bearing arms against heaven, nay, against the Almighty himself, thus to attack his ambassador; and, overpowered with the awe of the presence of the man of God, and with the living conviction that Elijah's God is the true God, he puts up his sword into the sheath, and his fifty with him, and reverently drawing near the prophet, exclaims, "O man of God, I pray thee, let my life and the life of these fifty, thy servants, be precious in thy sight. Behold there came fire down from heaven and burnt up the two captains of the former fifties with their fifties; therefore let my life now be precious in thy sight." O, how must Elijah have rejoiced at this submission to the living God, which delivered him from the mournful necessity of avenging the honour of his master, the third time,



with flames of fire. For, without controversy, his soul had no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but it was his delight, even as it is the delight of his Lord, that the sinner should turn from his ways and live. It must have cost him no small struggle to call forth the sword of the Lord from its sheath, and the fire of the Lord from heaven. But where it was necessary, his divine commission enjoined it; the sacred end of his whole prophetic life required it, for the extirpation of idolatry and demon-worship, the restoration of the dishonoured law, and the rekindling of the extinguished faith of his fathers. The weapons of his warfare, then, were not carnal. They were wielded by that queen of passions,—love to God and his cause; and brandished in the service of holy zeal, for the glory of Jehovah's name. It was because the canker of idolatry had eaten so deeply into the heart of the chosen people, that such painful excision and cautery was necessary, that the health of the daughter of Zion might be recovered.

Let me remark further, that, in studying such narratives as the present, we should ever bear in mind that the times of the Old Testament were very different from those of the Christian dispensation, and that much which it was proper for Elijah to perform, would be far from right in a disciple of the New Testament. You all know the pleasing contrast which our Saviour draws between the two dispensations, (Luke ix. 55), in relation to this one point of the divine treatment of sinners. No doubt the indignation of the disciples against that city of Samaria which refused to receive the Lord of Zion was in itself just and right; only the way in which they sought to express their zeal for the honour of their master was totally alien from their character as disciples of the Son of Man. They wished, as ye know, to tread in the footsteps of Elijah, and said, "Lord wilt thou that we command fire to fall from heaven and consume them, as Elias did?" But what says the Lord himself. To indicate that the whole of this procedure showed a misconception of the character of their age and their vocation, he replies, "Ye know not what manner of

spirit ye are of ; for the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." As if he had said, " The days of severity are past, and those of mildness have succeeded them. The discipline of Mount Sinai is no longer the rule ; but patience and love. Elijah was a herald of divine justice, and it behoved him to appear as with the ensigns of majesty and terror. Ye are messengers of peace, who have to win the hearts of sinners with the gospel of grace, and thus your feet must be beautiful upon the mountains." And as it has in these last days been made manifest in the long-suffering with which the vessels of wrath are endured, that a hand once pierced sways the sceptre of the world's government, and a Friend of sinners sits on the throne of dominion ; so ought the New Testament Church to exhibit in its essence a true image of the gentle and patient Lamb of God, in whose blood they are cleansed, and who, through endurance and suffering, entered into his glory. The lovely image of the compassionate Son of Man ought to be visible in all his members, and the captivating lustre of his merciful and gracious nature ought never to disappear from the society of his friends. Thus it is at all times infinitely more becoming in us, as followers of the Lamb, to pray for the enemies of the cause of truth, than to call down the lightnings of heaven upon their heads. Unspeakably more appropriate is it to our place, in patience and meekness to heap coals of fire upon the heads of our adversaries, and overcome them by the power of love, than, in the spirit of the law, to implore the wrath of the Almighty to go forth against them. In short, our whole walk and conversation should make it manifest that we are the disciples of that Master "who came not to destroy men's lives but to save them;" and that our poor hearts have found, at the foot of his cross, the fountain of that love opened in them, which finds it easy to bear all things, and believe all things, and endure all things, even that love which many waters cannot quench, nor the floods drown.

III. "O man of God, let my life and the life of these fifty thy servants, be precious in thy sight." Thus spake the third captain, with entreaties and on his knees; and his sincere submission was the means of his escape. "For God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." The Lord said to Elijah, "Go down with him; be not afraid of him." What a command! what a mission! He was now to enter into the very midst of the enemy's camp, and repeat to the enraged monarch at Samaria the oracle of doom. But the words, "Be not afraid," bear him up, as on eagles' wings, above all care and anxiety. He leaves the lonely hills, and hastens by the captain's side to the royal city.

As a conqueror enters the gates of some captured fortress, amid the waving of victorious banners, Elijah entered the capital of Samaria. He knows that, in the gathering crowds upon the street, he sees only embittered enemies; but he walks on with a dignity and majesty which overawes the most daring blasphemer, and checks every word of reviling or insult. The king is turning impatiently on his bed, and asking fretfully whether there be not yet news of the last dispatched captain; when lo, the door of his apartment opens, and who can describe Ahaziah's amazement, as he sees the object of his malice, the man with the hairy mantle and the leathern girdle, with grave and stately mien approach his couch. The monarch is utterly daunted by the calm and solemn air of the man of God; his rage is stifled and restrained; and he feels himself quite at the prophet's mercy. But Elijah utters no harsh word, no taunt of triumph. He knows that in this impious man he still beholds his lawful sovereign, the anointed of the Lord. He will not speak evil of dignities, or forget the sanctity which in Israel attached to the kingly crown. He looks upon himself merely as the organ of the Divine voice, and puts his own personal wrongs and feelings of holy zeal aside. He keeps strictly to the letter of the Divine message; and without deviating a hair's-breadth from it, he declares, "Thus saith the

Lord, Forasmuch as thou hast sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron ; is it not because there is no God in Israel to inquire of his word ; therefore thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die." Thus spake Elijah, and departed. But the word which he had spoken remained behind. "He died," says the sacred narrative, "according to the word of the Lord, which Elijah had spoken." The Church of God on earth had one destroyer less, and hell one victim more.

"In Judah is God known," sings the holy psalmist, "his name is great in Israel.

"In Salem also is his tabernacle, and his dwelling-place in Zion. There brake he the arrows of the bow, the shield, the sword, and the battle. Selah.

"Thou art more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey. The stout-hearted are spoiled, they have slept their sleep ; and none of the men of might have found their hands.

"At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, both the chariot and the horse are cast into a dead sleep.

"Thou, even thou, art to be feared ; and who may stand in thy sight when once thou art angry ? Thou didst cause judgment to be heard from heaven ; the earth feared, and was still.

"When God arose to judgment, to save all the meek of the earth. Selah.

"Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee ; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.

"Vow and pay unto the Lord your God ; let all that be round about him bring presents unto him that ought to be feared.

"He shall cut off the spirit of princes ; he is terrible to the kings of the earth." Psal. lxxvi.

Hallelujah ! To him be the glory and the kingdom for ever and ever ! Amen.

## I.—THE WORK-DAY EVENING.

SACRED HISTORY, my brethren, may be regarded as a Divine prophecy, which is in part yet unfulfilled. In its pleasing images we may thus revive our spirits amid all the gloom and barrenness of the present times. The world of glory and beauty which flourished on the soil of Israel is not a world of the dead, over whose fallen and wasted relics we can only weep and pour forth hopeless sighs. It points like a monument with a half-defaced inscription to a brighter future; and its inscription is the saying of Solomon, taken in its deepest and holiest sense, "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be." Eccl. i. 9.

From the history of Eden, down to the glorious Church of Pentecost, which is at last to embrace all nations, all the spiritual creations which we meet with in the world of sacred history, shall one day be restored in exalted splendour. The calm and holy patriarchal graces shall rise in youthful beauty from the tomb. The mighty men of God, Abraham, and Moses, Elijah, and all the rest, shall be sent forth again in transfigured glory. The age of sweet singers and psalmists shall return with holier melodies; and the gentle days of Solomon shall revisit the whole earth with a purer and more blessed peace. This cheering prospect relieves the sadness with which we would otherwise walk through the grand and lovely scenes of a former dispensation, and inspires us with a joy which is the earnest of that with which the Church shall yet be filled.

Let this soothing feeling attend us this day, as we approach, in company with Elijah, one of the most glorious works which Divine grace ever gave birth to before the Christian era.

## 2 KINGS ii. 1—6.

“ And it came to pass, when the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee ; for the Lord hath sent me to Beth-el. And Elisha said unto him, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Beth-el. And the sons of the prophets that were at Beth-el came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to-day ? And he said, Yea, I know it ; hold ye your peace. And Elijah said unto him, Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee ; for the Lord hath sent me to Jericho. And he said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they came to Jericho. And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to-day ? And he answered, Yea, I know it ; hold ye your peace. And Elijah said unto him, Tarry, I pray thee, here ; for the Lord hath sent me to Jordan. And he said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they two went on.”

The prophet has finished his work upon earth. A lovely evening of rest, tinged with the golden light of a more blissful world, settles down upon the weary pilgrim in holy and inspiring calm ; and the cheerful images of home already play in glad and tempting promise around his longing soul. He is like the mariner who, after a long and stormy voyage, is now in sight of his harbour, and hastens with joy to strike his topmasts and take in his sails. He walks for a few days longer, as if already amid the sounds of heavenly music, to muse in pensive affection and brightening thought on the fruits of his labours, which now disclose themselves more clearly to his view. It is to these peaceful days in which the mysteries of his life are most happily resolved, and all seeming discords melt in the sweetest harmony, that our history is now to conduct us, and to refresh us with its calm and delightful contrast to the struggles and the sorrows of his earlier ministry.

In the passage before us there are three points worthy of especial consideration. I. Elijah's desire for retirement. II. His visit to the schools of the prophets. III. The reception he meets with there.

I. Elijah has withdrawn from the bustle of the capital into the secluded valleys of the Jordan. We find him at

present in the little town of Gilgal, not far from Jericho, on that memorable spot where Joshua, after the miraculous passage through the Jordan, set up twelve stones to be an enduring memorial of the Divine mercy and faithfulness, "That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty." If ever these ancient words had deeply affected the prophet and revived his soul with new strength, it was assuredly now, when his own situation was in more than one respect so strikingly like that of his forefathers. If the moss-covered stones were still there, how must they have moved his heart? He could set up his Ebenezer beside them, and consecrate it with the tears of holy and humble thankfulness. For through how many a Jordan that threatened to engulf him and swallow up his fairest hopes, had he been carried by an almighty arm as it were on dry land.

The stones of Gilgal excite in me a desire, which I will freely utter. We have a Bible in word; we have another in nature; I wish we had a third in monuments. The place where the bones of a distinguished saint of God repose till the great day; where a martyr in Christ's cause won the bloody crown; where the arm of the Lord has signally revealed itself for judgment or deliverance; such places, and they are to be found in every land and in every province, well deserve, after the example of Israel, to be marked out by memorials which should save the names of the saints from the ravages of time, and bring near and perpetuate from age to age the marvellous works of the Lord. Who does not know the mighty, magical, and hundred-tongued language of association by place, which is of all languages the most universal, and can call whole worlds of thought and emotion into life by a word. In this exercise, art would find her true vocation and sphere of effort. She would thus become as she was at the beginning, and as she ought ever to be, a herald of the Divine glory, a handmaid of the sanctuary and kingdom of God.

The prophet has now completed his pilgrimage. Of this a divine revelation made him fully aware. The horses of

fire and the flaming chariot stand already prepared behind the clouds to fetch him away ; nor has the Lord concealed from him the distinguished manner of his departure. With this great secret to stir his soul, he goes from Gilgal to Bethel, to bid a last farewell to his dear children in the schools of the prophets. He hoped to have made this journey alone ; but scarcely has he taken his staff, when Elisha appears, and is eager to attend him. However unseasonable the prophet might think the request, he had too much regard for his faithful friend to reject his society all at once. They proceed, therefore, on their way together ; but had not gone far till Elijah can no longer conceal the longing of his heart for solitude. He therefore says to him, "Tarry here, I pray thee, for the Lord hath sent me to Bethel." But no ! Elisha cannot on this occasion consent to the request of his venerable master. "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth," he replied with calm decision, "I will not leave thee ;" and again they resume their journey. Twice again—at Bethel and at Jericho—Elijah repeats his request with increasing urgency, "Tarry here, I pray thee, for the Lord hath sent me to Jordan." But no entreaty or adjuration availed ; Elisha continued in the same calm strain, "I will not leave thee."

This urgent desire of the prophet to be alone is not hard to comprehend. You know how great a distinction was about to be vouchsafed him from the Lord. Once only before in the history of the world had the same honour been conferred ; but what was even Enoch's triumph to that of Elijah ! The latter was not merely to be taken to heaven without tasting of death ; but to be translated amid a visible and stupendous display of glory. A whirlwind and a fiery chariot from the world above were provided to give awfulness and grandeur to the scene. Nay, Elijah knew beforehand the day and the hour of the unparalleled event. Now, realize all this in thought, and you will be astonished, not that he wished to be alone, but that his soul was not entirely overwhelmed by such an anticipation. How must he have felt when he lifted up



his eyes to the heavens, and gazed upon the stars in the firmament, and then reflected with himself: Behold, in a few days thou shalt be passing far beyond Orion and the Pleiades, along a path of light far beyond the sun and moon; and then, oh then, thou shalt pass through the curtain into the sanctuary of God, into the eternal light of day where Jehovah sitteth on his throne, where the angels strike their harps, and the patriarchs dwell in their peaceful tabernacles. There shalt thou see all the fathers of old face to face, Noah and Enoch, Methuselah and Melchizedek, and the Father of the faithful, and Moses, and the Psalmist, the man after God's own heart; and amid their many mansions there shall be one for thee. With them, reposing under the palms of paradise, thou shalt hear them tell of their pilgrimage of old, and of the thousand wonders of Divine love. Yea, thou shalt behold the King of kings, Jehovah himself. Tell me, my friends, if amid thoughts like these, (and where could his thoughts now be, but among these celestial scenes?) it was any wonder that all the fountains of his being were opened, and that his soul, absorbed in the depths of its own emotions, had no relish for the company of his dearest friend? Especially when he reflected who he was, that the Lord should thus visit *him*, and, contrasted with the opening scene of glory, the image of that life which was soon to close, and which with all its reflected splendour, was still the life of a poor sinner, darkened with many sins and errors, how deeply must he have wished to be alone with his God. Many had been the spiritual experiences of the prophet; but never had his thoughts been carried away by so extraordinary an impulse as the present. The excitement of imagination, the thrill of expectation, the transport of hope, the prostration of humility, were all too deep and unutterable to be poured into a single human heart. God alone could be the refuge of such a soul. Whether Elisha comprehended any thing of this abstraction of his master in the work of reflection, confession, supplication, thanksgiving, and praise, we cannot

tell. He would certainly have done the prophet a great service had he consented to stay behind. But to this no argument can move him. He is firmly resolved not for one moment to leave him.

There was, however, something else which induced Elijah at this time to wish for the absence of his friend, and a something which, if the man of God had not already won our best affections, could not but gain him our hearts. It was the depth of his humility which moved him to meet his translation alone—a humility which contrasts strongly with our own too frequent desire to magnify self in promoting the kingdom of God. O, thou noble Tishbite, how does thy august aspect cast us all into the shade! Thou desirest to be nothing that God may be everything, and tremblest lest thou shouldest be taken for more than a dark shadow, to set off the Divine glory. Concealing the secret of thy approaching triumph, thou fliest the eye of witnesses, and seekest a veil for thy glory, afraid lest any one should admire and praise, instead of the Sun, the little dewdrop that reflects his beams. And yet thou hadst not seen him, who spake, “I am meek and lowly in heart.” “I seek not mine own honour, but his that sent me.” We have seen him—the beloved of the Father—and yet how clearly does his image shine in thee compared with us. “Tarry here, I pray thee, for the Lord hath sent me to Beth-el.” Yes, we penetrate thy motive, we understand thy request, and are covered with shame!

O, I know nothing within the pale of the Church of God more lovely than those finely strung spirits, which can speak only with a trembling shame and a stammering tongue of the great things which the Lord hath done for them, while they are deeply penetrated with anxiety lest what they owe to the free grace of God alone should be ascribed at all to their own natural goodness or piety. Would that there were more among us of these hidden jewels and flowers among the thorns! For such souls find favour, and recommend the cause of God even to the men of this world.

Thrice—at Gilgal, at Bethel, and at Jericho—has Elijah with increasing earnestness urged his companion to leave him; and thrice does Elijah receive the same decided reply:—"As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." Elijah was therefore obliged to yield to the importunity of his friend. And doubtless he was the more easily induced to comply, the more distinctly he inferred, from the repeated and solemn protestations of Elisha, that the mystery of his approaching translation had been revealed to him also, and a divine commission given him to attend his master to the very verge of immortality, perhaps that he might afterwards be able to bear his testimony to this great miracle before the world. And without question it was so; and hence the earnestness of Elisha's asseveration, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth." When the Lord makes a display of his glory and greatness among men, he does not mean that it should be hidden in a corner. In its own time, every thing covered must be made known, and contribute to the honour of him who fills heaven and earth with the full splendour of his glory. And hence it frequently happens that he surrounds his children, even when they think no eye of mortal sees them, with secret witnesses, whose it is to observe from behind a curtain their private deeds of charity and devout experiences. Thus many a precious soul enters heaven, supposing that no one knows any thing of its life and experience, and itself ignorant of the lustre of holiness which God has shed around it. But when such saints are no more, all is brought to light: the Lord himself lifts the veil, and to the praise of his glorious grace, and the consolation of their brethren in the faith, it becomes apparent how perfect God's strength was made in their weakness, and how much the Lord had accomplished in them and by them. Thus they enjoy a resurrection from the dead, as it were, before the time. From the humble drapery of their shroud their comes forth a living statue of grace and beauty, which is set up for ages to come in the best of all shrines, the faithful remem-

brance of the saints of God. Their holy deeds are entwined together into the bright garland which hangs over their graves. Their unexpected legacy of devout experiences becomes the treasure of thousands. Let me remind you, my friends, by way of example, of two eminent saints lately deceased, and well known to you, the amiable Jaenike of Berlin, and the faithful Krafft of Cologne. How many admirable things respecting both have come to light since their departure! what a number of the loveliest acts of their life did we learn for the first time beside their graves! O! I hope there are still amongst us many who, like Abel, will begin to speak loudest when dead, and who have still the fairest and brightest side of their life "hid with Christ in God."

II. Elijah and Elisha, now fully united in consent and purpose, went on from Gilgal together. Their way led first to the little town of Bethel. There the sons of the prophets went out to meet them; and the same reception awaited them at Jericho. These were unexpected and gratifying occurrences, especially in an age when the true faith had almost vanished, and the streets of Jerusalem lay waste. But who were these sons of the prophets? Let me briefly attempt to answer this question.

When Moses, looking upon Israel in a moment of inspiration, exclaimed, "Behold how wise and understanding they are, and a glorious people!" none will question the justice of this eulogy, but those whose whole ideas of education are taken from the schools of Athens, and who have no higher standard whereby to try the minds of men, than that furnished by the vain show of heathen wisdom and genius. God had set apart for himself the instruction, training, and enlightenment of the people of Israel. What wonder, then, that under such a Teacher, a race was formed, whose modes of life and institutions form the outlines and models according to which the Almighty, in the millennial age, will call forth that mighty renovation which awaits the earth and all that is in it, animate and inanimate!

And as we find among this distinguished people all the institutions of human society in their best forms, so in particular those of education. Schools, in the modern acceptance of the term, do not appear to have been known in Israel, at least till the Babylonish captivity. But, instead of these, home and school were one ; and, instead of hireling teachers, instruction was poured from the tender hearts of father and mother. Under the green shade of the vine and the fig-tree, and before the peaceful dwelling, the child learned to lisp the name of Jehovah. There the sacred histories of the days of old, recited with the eloquence of affection, passed before the admiring soul. There, in the way of tale and lively story, the ideas of God and the great ends of human life were insensibly impressed upon the youthful heart. There it early learned to apprehend what is eternally true, and good, and beautiful, in fresh and vivid examples ; and before it was aware that its years of tuition were come, it was already exercised in the lessons of Israel's wisdom. It was inspired with the hopes and prospects of the chosen people, impregnated with the ideas of its greatest sages and heroes, again to become in it the seeds of a new harvest, and filled with impulses which carried the youthful spirit forward in a course of high enterprise ; which, as it took the form of thought, or devotion, or prophetic anticipation, pierced upwards through the clouds of heaven, and forwards through the bounds of time, and from which hardly an hostile force could entirely or for ever divert the soul. Prepared by such a popular education in the highest sense of the word, the young Israelite came forth from his paternal dwelling, sound in mind and body, with an open eye for all that is worth observing, susceptible, like good soil, of the best culture, and pliant, like a hopeful shoot that has been raised from a healthy seed. Thus carrying in his hand, from home, the key to the books of Scripture, of Providence, and of Nature, he hardly needed farther direct instruction. A heart once opened to the spiritual world can find itself everywhere in a school of wisdom. The stars of heaven, the trees and

flowers of the field, preached to him ; and the instructive voices of Levites and prophets, that sounded everywhere through the land, found in his soul, as in a well-built temple, a prompt and living echo.

Now, if any one among these young men felt an urgent call in spirit to penetrate deeper into the mysteries of the kingdom of God, to apprehend its great principles in their connexion, to choose the study of heavenly wisdom as the business of his life, and to become a teacher of Israel, the schools of the prophets were open to receive him ; which, since the days of Samuel, appear as the fairest blossoms of Israel's history. To these we shall hardly find any parallel in our days, except it be in those missionary seminaries, which, within the last few years, have been called into being by a re-awakened faith, and crowned everywhere with a visible blessing. The former, like the latter, owe their origin to the contrast of a mournful state of ecclesiastical degeneracy and moral disorder. The feeble character of the high-priest Eli and the profligacy of his sons too clearly indicate the spiritual condition of a period in which men like them were the crown of the nation and the guardians of the sanctuary. A speedy and powerful remedy was therefore called for, to arrest the moral corruption before it became universal and incurable. And such a remedy God sent in the person of a man who shines among the brightest of Israel's worthies, and with whom a new epoch begins, that embraced the happiest days of the Old Testament Church. This was Samuel, who, uniting in himself the threefold office of judge, and prophet, and priest, at a happy moment laid hold of the helm of the shattered church and state, and with steady hand guided both through otherwise fatal perils. The earnest attention of this great reformer was chiefly directed to the rising generation, whom he strove to mould to a better character than their fathers ; and from whom he looked not only for a sounder spirit in the community, but also for a succession of able counsellors and leaders. For this purpose he called around him young men of piety, intelligence, and zeal. and

taught them under his guidance to devote their powers to the study of divine truth ; thus laying the foundation of the schools of the prophets, and introducing that happy institution which was destined to become Israel's brightest ornament, as well as its best security, the source of her spiritual life, as well as the repository of her intellectual treasures.

Of these interesting seminaries the scripture mentions five : two under Samuel ; one of them at Kirjath-Jearim, where the ark of the covenant was then kept, 1 Sam. x. 5—10 ; another at Ramah, 1 Sam. xix. 18—26 ; and three more in the times of Elijah and Elisha, at Gilgal, Jericho, and Bethel. In these towns, or very near them, dwelt these devoted young men ; the unmarried apparently in one household together, the married apart with their families. Since they derived no regular support from the state, the pupils of these seminaries had to maintain themselves as husbandmen or mechanics. This was not thought singular in Israel ; much less contemptible. It continued afterwards the practice of learned men of this nation, to acquire with their learning some art or trade. Many of their most distinguished Rabbis have been even surnamed according to their civil calling, as " Rabbi Juda, the baker ;" " Rabbi Isaac, the smith ;" " Rabbi Johanan, the shoemaker," &c. It was never imputed to Paul and Aquila by their enemies as anything degrading, that they wrought at their occupation of tent-makers. That the sons of the prophets understood and carried on such occupations is evident from 2 Kings vi. 4, where we find them with axes and other tools cheerfully employed in constructing their dwellings.

The instructors of these young men were the prophets, these steady lights in the midst of darkness, these standard-bearers in every conflict with error, these great upholders of the ancient theocracy, who were richly endowed with all the gifts of the Spirit, and attested before all the people by signs and wonders as the heralds and ambassadors of God, as the interpreters of the old revelation and the vehicles of the new, as the expounders of the past and the seers of

the future. As fathers among their children they lived in the midst of their pupils, unless when summoned to the field of public labour, and their instructions, free from all formality and pedantry, were rather like the overflowings of full and zealous hearts, that sought only the sympathy and co-operation of youthful minds. The subject of study was doubtless the divine word, and the tongues of these teachers were "like the pen of a ready writer," who had himself searched the deep things of God. Their reading was doubtless something else than what passes for helps to scripture study in the present day, of which the sole aim seems to be to weary us with trifling difficulties and with discordant and barren criticism. Here the positive meaning of revelation was searched out, and "the letter which killeth" made way for "the spirit which giveth life." Sacred history in their hands was not a mere skeleton list of names and dates, a collection of dry bones, very many and very dry; for the voice of a prophet was uttered over them, and they arose a great army of witnesses to the glorious perfections and plans of Jehovah. If the mysteries of Aaron's priesthood and the ceremonial law engaged them, they did not fall into the blind and bigotted literalism of the pharisees of after times; but opened out the hidden gospel from its larva-like envelopment, and found in all sacrifice a type of the bleeding Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world, and in all the hieroglyphics of the tabernacle, the "patterns of things in the heavens." They must also have studied their civil law, one main institution of the theocracy; and also their mother tongue which had been consecrated in being used by God himself.

The special employments, however, of these sons of the prophets, as they are presented to us in scripture history, are those of prophecy and sacred music. In 1 Sam. x., we find a whole company of them meeting Saul on the hill of God, near Kirjath-Jearim, with a "psaltery, a tabret, a pipe, and a harp" before them, and themselves prophesying. And in 1 Sam. xix, we see king Saul once more at



Ramah, meeting an assembly of the sons of the prophets, with Samuel set over them, prophesying. From both passages it is evident that the art of sacred melody and harmony was diligently cultivated in these peaceful retreats and nurseries of piety, and kept in their original place, by being devoted to the praise of God, and the enlivening and beautifying of domestic life. By what is called their prophesying, we are to understand nothing more than the outpouring of the emotions of the heart in verse, at the impulse of the Holy Ghost; which was the highest and holiest form of improvisation; at one time accompanied with the notes of psaltery or harp; at another, more in the form of sacred oratory without accompaniment.

If now the final object of these excellent schools was not exactly to form *prophets and seers*—for such the Lord forms and calls of himself—yet the Lord could always find in these companies of youth such as were possessed of all human qualifications for the office, when it pleased him to select from among them those who should discharge the highest functions of prophecy. It is in the highest degree probable that most of Israel's prophets were trained in these schools; at least, the shepherd Amos seems to denote his vocation to the office as an exception to the rule, when he says, chap. vii. 14, 15, "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son, but I was an herdsman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit; and the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel." At any rate these establishments provided the country with many enlightened teachers, with many zealous, and intelligent, and faithful heads of families and judges. And even had they not done so much as this, their very existence in the land served a high and sacred purpose. They were the depositories of Israel's law and oracles; they shone like lights in the midst of a perverse and crooked generation, and reprov'd apostacy more deeply by example than all the thunders of rebuke. Their quiet but mighty influence served as a barrier against the inroads of surrounding heathen darkness. They were as a

guiding star to the wandering spirit tossed in the sea of error, an asylum for the spiritually distressed, and a fountain-head of refreshment and joy to the whole land, from which we cannot tell what streams of healing may have flowed from age to age.

O, my brethren, what sadness oppresses my heart as I turn from viewing these ancient pious seminaries to contemplate the institutions of the present day, high and low, that profess to be devoted to a similar object. O, ye children of Israel, how much better were ye provided for than most of our youth in the present times! and we are *Christians*. Where shall we seek, in these days, for schools of instruction in which another spirit rules than that of the world and the profane? Where flourish the seminaries to which Hope can turn its eye for a better generation than their fathers? Alas! the search would prove vain; in spite of all the vaunted perfection to which the art of education has now been brought in this much-talked-of age of enlightenment. In what, pray, consists this boasted perfection? Is it in the extended range of lifeless science, through whose scattered fragments our sons and daughters must be hastily dragged, to the confusion of all just and solid thinking? Is it in the complete separation of all modern training from the word of truth and the gospel of salvation? Or is it in the loose way in which individual branches of knowledge are handled, apart from their connexion with all higher wisdom? Or is it in the confused mass of heathen notions in politics, morals, and law, with which, in multitudes of our schools, the unhappy youth are supplied by blind leaders of the blind?

If in all our schools these unhappy features are not equally manifest, we must ascribe it exclusively to the restraining grace of that invisible Watcher who has hitherto arrested the full development of the germs of evil which are so thickly sown. To Him, whose thoughts towards us are thoughts of peace and not of evil, be all our places of education, high and low, devoutly commended! May

He reform, re-organize, and consecrate them to Himself ! Let us acknowledge with thanksgiving that in some places a better day has dawned ; and, in particular, that here and there religion has acquired greater prominence, and that the hours devoted to it have been doubled. But we still lack the true Spirit, the Spirit of the Lord ; and never shall our seminaries be nurseries for eternity, till He descend upon them, like a rushing mighty wind, and pervade and animate and sanctify all their arrangements. Our hope of better times must rest on the invisible guarantee of the divine promises, and God be thanked that these are such as to banish all despair ! The rays of that bright Day-star of promise are especially cheering, which shines forth among the predictions of Zechariah (xiv. 20, 21), “ In that day there shall be upon the bells of the horses *Holiness unto the Lord* ; and the pots in the Lord’s house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord of hosts, and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them and seethe therein ; and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts.” What a glorious and enrapturing prospect is here opened up to us of the state of a revived church and converted world ! On the very bells of the horses the same inscription is written as on the forehead of the high-priest, “ Holiness to the Lord.” The distinction between *sacred* and *profane* shall be done away by a diffusion of sanctity over all the arts of life and their instruments. The sciences shall be handmaids of religion, and the glory of Christ shall be their Alpha and Omega. The arts shall return to the service of the sanctuary, and all their creations shall breathe the spirit of heaven. Then, by the graves of the schools of the prophets, the dirge of woe shall be changed into the song of rejoicing, as they rise in purer forms from their ashes, and become no more the refuge and hiding-place of persecuted truth, but the centres of a universal wisdom, and the head-quarters of all spiritual enterprise. Happy days, when will ye take the wings of the morning and dawn

upon us? We gaze with tears on your distant brightness, and utter the prayer "Thy kingdom come!"

III. Great must have been the joy of Elijah, in entering, once more, before his departure, these schools of the prophets, and hearing there the echo of all those sighs and prayers for Israel's restoration which he had supposed to be without counterpart. The sight of these fair "gardens of the Lord" must have rebuked his former complaints and anxious fears, and deepened the self-humiliation which now wrought in his mind, as he thought of the dark hours when his labour seemed entirely without fruits. These blossoms of promise, blooming in a moral waste and amid the storms of persecution, and rich with the hope of "fruit unto holiness" in after days, were delightful evidence that his labour had not been "in vain in the Lord." What a proof was this of the faithfulness and grace of him "who out of stones can raise up children to Abraham!" And how cheering to the prophet's heart to associate with the hope of heavenly glory the other hope of leaving the church on earth supplied with a goodly band of champions, by whom the last bulwarks of idolatry might be perhaps subverted, and the banner of the Lord erected everywhere on the towers and hills of Zion.

As Elijah and Elisha approach Bethel, the sons of the prophets are already aware of the loss that awaits them. Doubtless the Lord himself had made it known to them, that they might know, for certain, how the course of this great man would end, and comfort themselves with the thought "that the Lord had taken him away." Never before had they saluted their paternal master with such feelings as on this occasion. How much did they need self-control to check the rising burst of emotion, and to hide, if not suppress, their tears. For a delicate sense of propriety taught them to conceal from the prophet their knowledge of his approaching removal. They venture to make known only to Elisha, the secret of their deeply affected souls, while they beckon him aside, and whisper,

with a trembling voice, in his ear, "Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to-day." But Elisha, as if to seal up their lips still more closely, gently said to them, "Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace." This happened at Bethel; and the same scene was repeated at Jericho. These are lovely incidents; delicate and characteristic in the highest degree. Their beauty must be felt and not reasoned about, for such tender flowers are injured by minute handling. I leave it to yourselves to enter into the reasons why the sons of the prophets spared Elijah the usual parting scene of grief and tears, and only remark how bright a light it casts on the prophet's character; and how fine a lesson it gives us, that in the kingdom of God, there is something which the world calls *discretion*, and which must be reckoned amongst the odours and perfumes which Sharon's roses and lilies shed around them.

O how glorious is the state of that soul which the Lord has formed "to newness of life." It is like a finely-strung harp, capable of every tone and modulation. The boldest sweep of psalms slumbers in its strings, and the gentlest notes of love; the deep and fervid song of the nightingale, and the innocent and lively carol of the lark. And even in its discords there is a higher harmony; its jars are inwrought into a sweeter unison. Amid the bursting strains of such living harps of God, Elijah passed the last hours of his earthly pilgrimage; the same Elijah who, in former days, had fitly strung and tuned them to the praise of the Eternal. We will not envy him the spiritual refreshment of the work-day evening. Rather we will call him blessed; and pray that we also, your teachers, may share in such an hour the lot of Elijah. May He in mercy grant it, in whose hand are the hearts of men. Amen.

## II.—THE PASSAGE THROUGH JORDAN.

“The king’s daughter is all glorious within.” In these words the inspired psalmist speaks of the true Church of God. (Psal. xlv. 13.) The fairest and grandest object on earth is a genuine Christian. The world does not acknowledge this. It has no eye for what is divinely great and glorious ; and how should it know and appreciate the nature and actions of one who is “born of God?”

The Christian is great in his repentance, for his repentance is an open rupture with sin and Satan. He is great in his desires, for the Supreme Good can alone satisfy his heart. He is great in his prayers, when he shakes the dust of earth from his feet, and with his “Abba, Father!” rises upwards to the heart of Jehovah! He is great in his hopes, for he is looking for nothing less than a participation of the glory and the inheritance of the Lord, his Redeemer. He is great in his tears, for they are the tears of a fallen king, who mourns a lost kingdom and a forfeited crown. He is great in his joy, for it is derived from another world, and its objects are beyond the skies! Yea, how much could we not tell of the greatness of a true Christian ; how much could we add to confirm the saying, “The king’s daughter is all glorious within.”

There is nothing more beautiful under heaven than the Divine work of grace in a renewed soul. Consider it in its full development in a Moses, an Elijah, or a Paul, and you will agree with me, when I call the moral miracles recorded in Sacred History more wonderful than the physical. I look with unspeakably greater amazement into the hearts of these men of God, than upon the most splendid scenes of their outward life. It cannot, after this view of their moral greatness, so much surprise me, that such men did not tread the ordinary smooth round of life, but rose to higher spheres and courses of activity. The power of working miracles appears to agree with such elevation

of character, as the mighty river to the Alpine summit where it takes its rise.

Let us bear this in mind, while we contemplate the stupendous act with which Elijah concluded the splendid series of his miracles.

2 KINGS ii. 7, 8.

“ And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan. And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground.”

Having conducted this master in Israel through the schools of the prophets, we again find ourselves in company with him and his faithful attendant on the solitary banks of the Jordan, where new scenes of wonder meet our view. Let us then contemplate for a little, I. The escort of the sons of the prophets. II. The miraculous passage through the Jordan.

I. In the lonely and silent wilderness of Jericho, where Israel's hosts first trod the promised land, Elijah and Elisha are seen walking on in rapt and solemn silence. Elijah, who knew that his hour was come, has already shaken off the dust of earth from his feet, and his thoughts wander in high anticipation to other worlds. Elisha is struggling to control his human feelings, and could all but arrest the flight of his venerable master. Walking as if alone in the wilderness, they approach the rushing stream. But they are not altogether alone, for many friendly eyes are resting on them from a distance, and with mingled grief and expectation following their track. Fifty men of the sons of the prophets could not find it in their hearts to remain that day in the town. It was their master's parting-day. To-day they could still see him; to-morrow he would be gone for ever. They could not retain him in their circle; but they could take a last long look of his receding form. They knew it was no common loss that awaited them. We can readily sympathize with their regret, if we but consider how great a blessing, in the pre-

sent day, the re-appearance of a man like Elijah would be to the Church of God.

Deep, indeed, and inexpressible was the sadness of this pious company. Yet we cannot doubt that there mingled with their melancholy, a calm and spreading joy, like a gleam of light upon a dark and troubled sea. They know that their master is to be translated to glory. They see him already mingling in the cloud of heavenly witnesses, and can almost for a moment forget their grief to celebrate his triumphant entry into heaven. O how blessed is the departure of those who are dear to us, when, beyond the thick darkness into which they have entered, there shines the happy light of a resurrection-morn! And oh, how heart-rending is it, how indescribably painful, when a friend whom we dearly loved must bid us farewell for ever, and we cannot tell whether his path is that of the just, nor say, "He is not lost, but gone before." Yes, the most precious legacy which our dying friends can leave us, is the joyful certainty that they have fallen asleep in Jesus. This blessed thought restores them to us in brighter forms; in the light of this assurance their eye still beams upon us, and our circle of friends is not diminished but only enlarged in its circumference. Yes, I well know the happiness of many of you who, in this delightful confidence, treasure up the images of departed parents, and brothers, and sisters, and friends. I well believe you, that you would not lose, for all the joys of earth, that comfort which, like a blessed star of promise, shines over the graves of your departed ones, and unites you for ever with those who are only for a brief season withdrawn from your eyes. Would that over our own graves such blessed flowers of hope may grow for the comfort of the dear hearts we leave behind! Would that the Spirit of grace may so set his mark on our foreheads, that when we depart, none may stand in doubt whether or not we have taken the heaven-ward way!

The sons of the prophets, doubtless, entertained the hope of being witnesses of Elijah's translation. Yet, as



is manifest from the sequel, they did not see it. It is impossible to say with certainty, why this sublime spectacle was not vouchsafed to them. But why, in general, it pleases the Lord to conceal the glorious issue of the saint's life by clouds and thick darkness, it is not hard to discover. Did we see, on the death of the righteous, heaven visibly opened ; did we follow the departed spirit from the chamber of death straight to the abodes of bliss ; did we behold around each death-bed the bright messengers of heaven in waiting, and hear them, when all was over, sounding their joyful greeting, and rising with the redeemed soul amid the choirs of paradise, we should then find our spiritual progress impaired instead of advanced. For do you think that we could then bear that long delay in the present world which our Father has appointed ? Would not the ardour of our longing to depart absorb all our zeal for God, and destroy our capacity for the duties of the present life ? How great is then the wisdom of the God of love, in allowing the termination of the narrow way to be still clouded with the shades of death, and in thus tempering the eagerness of our heaven-ward impulses, and suffering patience to have her perfect work in this land of exile and of tears !

That the sons of the prophets stood afar off, and did not approach nearer to their departing master, is a lovely picture of the scene, equally favourable to both. They knew their spiritual father too well, not to know that he would shrink from having the approaching scene of his exaltation gazed on by a host of spectators, and they had delicacy of feeling enough not to obtrude themselves on him. O that among us, this refined spiritual delicacy were not so rare as it appears to be ! There are many cases in which it would be peculiarly in its place ; but we too often violate or neglect it, and our standing " afar off " is rare indeed. If, for example, the grace of God should begin to affect any one amongst us who may be outwardly distinguished, here is a case where much discretion is called for. We should observe the fact as if we observed it not, and

keep it as a pleasing secret to ourselves ; and should any one disclose it to us, we should reply as at Jericho and Bethel, " Yea, I know it ; hold thou thy peace." For such persons, especially at the first setting out, must be dealt with discreetly ; and all the more so, in proportion as the world has hitherto held them in its bondage of form and false delicacy, and as they stand high in society. Should it come to the ears of such persons, that the report of their conversion is bandied about, it will naturally make an impression upon them unfavourable to their spiritual progress, nay, often throw them many degrees back into their former coldness. They are not yet strong enough in the faith to take up the cross openly and follow Christ. But we very commonly forget all this ; and raise a loud and ill-judged rumour in such a case, and seem not to be aware that a tender shoot requires a very different kind of handling from a full-grown tree. Many other cases might be mentioned illustrative of this truth ; and I trust you are now persuaded, that " refinement" and " good taste," so much commended by the men of the world, ought to have a just and free play within the circle of the Church of Christ.

II. Elijah having arrived at the brink of the Jordan, had not long to consider how he should pass the river. The thought of Moses occurs to him, as with a stroke of his rod he parted the Red Sea asunder ; and the thought followed : the God of Moses is the God of Elijah. With a faith like this, " he took his mantle and wrapped it together," and with the air of one who gave law to the elements, he smote the river. His God is with him, and the miracle instantly ensues. What a spectacle ! The stream is divided. On the one side it rushes hastily on ; on the other, it towers up like a wall of crystal ; and the two prophets pass over, dryshod, to the opposite shore. But no sooner are they over, than the curling heap sinks down into its old channel, its invisible barriers are removed, and the unfettered stream flows on in its wonted course.

How great a God is our God, who thus rules with absolute freedom in his own kingdom of nature, and can suspend the operations of all things, in heaven and in earth, at his pleasure. His rebuke drieth up the seas, and turneth the springs into a wilderness ! The winds and the waves obey him ; and, in the hand of his messengers, a rod or a mantle becomes a sceptre of mysterious dominion. Happy is the man whose refuge is the Lord, for to his salvation the Rock of Israel can make all things minister, even against their nature and tendency. In His strength we leap over every wall, and by faith in His name we remove mountains of difficulties out of the way.

The dividing of the Jordan formed the last link of that chain of stupendous wonders which runs through the prophetic life of Elijah. It serves to teach us that this great spiritual hero, notwithstanding all his fatigues and trials, had not become decrepit in faith with the progress of his years, but held fast the beginning of his confidence steadfast to the end. The uses of this last act of faith were, according to the divine purpose, great and manifold. To Elisha, who was about to inherit his master's mantle, it would serve as an encouragement to be strong in faith ; to the children of the prophets it would be a final memento of the greatness of him at whose feet they had sat ; to the whole people, to whom it would doubtless be announced, it would prove a fresh sign that a prophet of the living God had been in the midst of them. To the prophet himself it would appear a new token of the Lord's loving-kindness, a new pledge of his faithfulness and truth ; and to us a cheering confirmation of the truth, that the Lord is with his people to the end. This act of the departing prophet resembled the bright track of a ship over the waves, which shines when she is far away on her course ; or the ruddy splendour of the evening sky, which tells us that that sun which has just vanished from our sight is not extinguished, but is only sunk in the wave to rise with renewed brightness in another hemisphere.

Elijah's passage over the Jordan reminds us strongly of

that of his forefathers over the same stream. And yet it seems in some points to excel it. In the one case there were solemn arrangements and preparations ; in the other, a free and simple action, as it were, in the impulse of the moment. There the ark of the covenant needed to go before, with the people at a reverend distance, and the waters yielded only to the tabernacle of the Almighty ; here they gave way before a simple man and a folded mantle in his hand. If the Israelites who passed over under Joshua had but seen this miracle of the Tishbite, how must they have been amazed at it, and confessed that God was here in very deed, dwelling with man upon the earth ! But, in this honour put upon Elijah, we have but a faint shadow of the glory reserved for the children of the New Testament dispensation.

When Elijah wrapped his mantle together to smite the waters of the river, he had already a dark sense of the kingly dominion which awaited him over the earth and its elements. In his act of faith we see the struggling of a more than mortal spirit, aspiring after higher regions of emancipation and liberty. He seems to have already in some measure shaken himself loose from bondage to the elements of this world. All has now to him a subject air, as if he were already set down with Christ on his throne. His faith could cast mountains into the sea, and pile up the sea to mountains, were it necessary. What is miraculous in the eyes of men has almost become familiar to his faith. A new region must shortly be opened to his soul, since this earth is become too small and narrow for it. Ye heavens unfold ! ye boundaries of earth and time retire, for here he must dwell no more below !

And as Elijah may be supposed to have been prepared by all this for the grand and otherwise overwhelming scenes on which he was about to enter, so also Elisha must have learned to view with greater faith and assurance that work of miracles which he was about to take up himself, and to catch something of the sublime spirit of his departing master. And this is just what happens still,

to all who are blessed with the society of distinguished men of God. The gifts of such men are for the good of others, not less than for their own. Striking answers to their prayers attract our own more steadily to the throne on high. When they, amid the storms of persecution, stand undaunted, like the rocks of ocean, it is that our look may become free and fearless as theirs. When they, under the cloud of personal suffering, have songs given them in the night, is it not that the spirit of joy may enter our hearts also, and give us the victory over all the cares of time? When they pass in triumph through the valley of the shadow of death, how ought such a scene to inspire us, and to raise us to a vantage-ground of faith, where we can hardly imagine that the last enemy can be terrible. Great spirits, like these, bear us away in their own noble career, and teach us to mount in their train. Would that there were more of such men to smite upon the waves of a stormy and distracted age, "that the ransomed of the Lord might pass over." And though we may lament their absence, let us bear in mind that the God of Elijah, of Paul, and of Luther, "sits King upon the floods." He has promised it, and the time shall come "when the weakest shall be as David, and the house of David shall be as the angel of the Lord before his people," Zech. xii. 8. "Yea," saith the Lord, "I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph; and they of Ephraim shall be like a mighty man, and their heart shall rejoice as through wine; yea their children shall see it and be blessed; their heart shall rejoice in the Lord," Zech. x. 6, 7. How blessed the prospect! We hail it with delight, and wait for it in the sunny light of hope. Amen.

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### III.—THE GREAT REQUEST.

It is a glorious confession of the Apostle Paul which we find in Gal. ii. 20, "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." If ever a saint of the Old Testament

period could use these words, in all their fulness, it was Elijah, at that interesting moment where we now behold him. His life of faith has now reached its point of culmination. Every thing of the servile spirit of the Old Testament is now vanished. The "Now" of the apostles is become his, in the glorious liberty of the children of God.

2 KINGS ii. 9, 10.

"And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee: but if not, it shall not be so."

The hour in which the prophet is to be withdrawn from our view is near at hand. Our present narrative conducts to the last boundary of his earthly course. We have here his last words, coming upon us as from another world; and his last work, less impressive indeed to the senses than his former acts, but not inferior to any; perhaps more astonishing than all. We have here to consider,—  
I. Their position after crossing the river. II. Elijah's proffer to his friend. III. The request of the latter, and Elijah's answer.

I. The prophet has now passed over Jordan. The sons of the prophets have had their last look of him, and shall see only yet farther the distant gleam of the chariot that was to bear him on high, and hear the strange roll of its heavenward flight. The prophet has left the Jordan behind him, and with it all the waters of sublunary trouble and sorrow. His Sabbath of rest is come, and he now only awaits the heavenly chariot. Enviably situation! and yet it is no more than a true image of what every Christian should reach through the gracious provisions of the gospel. All the depths and whirlpools that roll and foam before thy shrinking footsteps thou mayest by one sincere act of faith, pass through, and stand on the other side. Does the dark stream of death make thee tremble

as in thought thou drawest near its brink ? Embark only in that sweet promise of thy Saviour, " I will come again and receive you to myself," and the flood is left behind. Do the swelling waves of temptation affright thee ? Behold the glorious assurance spanning the gulf, that the Lord " will not suffer you to be tempted above what ye are able to bear," and this deep also has lost all its terrors. Do the waters of outward tribulation rise around thee, or dost thou cherish a foreboding fear that gloomy swamps and hidden pits may lie across thy future way ? Remember, that as thy day is, so shall thy strength be ; and thus safe in the guidance of that Eternal Wisdom, from which each day comes as a messenger of love with its needful mercy to sweeten judgment, thou shalt be led " unto the wealthy place." Thou art complete in Jesus ; and " neither height nor depth, nor things present nor things to come, shall be able to separate thee from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." He has trampled upon sin and Satan, and the world and death, not only for himself, but also for thee ; and hence even in the midst of the conflict thou art more than conqueror, and mayest take up already " the song of Moses and the Lamb."

II. The two men of God had advanced some way into the wilderness, when all at once Elijah, with an expression of deep solemnity and tenderness, which may well have made Elisha start as if the hour of parting were already come, turned towards him, not to say farewell, but to give him his last paternal blessing. It was not couched in the form of a simple wish or prayer, but contained an extraordinary and definite promise : " Ask what I shall do for thee before I be taken away from thee." These are great words ! But what kind of benefit did Elijah intend ? Was it the gold of Ophir, or the wisdom of the wise, or even the best counsel of his own prophetic mind ? No. He was thinking of the good and perfect gifts that come from the Father of Lights alone. He speaks as if all the treasures of heaven were at his command, and as if Elisha

had only to make his choice. This language of confidence was a high attainment even in Elijah, and it confirms what we have already said before, that he now breathed, in all its purity, the blessed element of New Testament freedom, along with the highest inspiration of prophetic grace.

This bold expression of Elijah reminds us of the promise of our Lord, which seems to remain as yet in its deepest import, to most Christians, as "a spring shut up," "a fountain sealed:" "Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name; ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." You know what is commonly understood by praying in the name of Jesus. People say that they pray in his name when they bring their requests before God in such a frame of spirit as not to hope for an answer on the ground of their own worthiness, but on that of the merits of Christ, and from free grace. They say that he alone prays in the name of Jesus who, with the humbling conviction that he is altogether devoid of any thing to recommend him to the Divine mercy, nevertheless draws near the throne of grace with his entire reliance fixed on the blood of Jesus, as what alone can make his prayer accepted in the sight of God. Is this explanation the true and correct one? Now I do not say exactly that it is incorrect; but it is defective and imperfect. A person may really pray in the state of mind just described, and yet not pray in the name of Jesus. If this had been all, our Saviour could not have said to his disciples, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name." They surely did not pray before with the spirit of the Pharisee, and in entire dependence on their own righteousness. And not only do our Lord's words include the eleven apostles; but they extend to the whole former dispensation, and assert of it that the mode of prayer which he is now enforcing was something of which it fell short. And hence, if prayer in Christ's name meant nothing more than praying in a contrite spirit and



with trust in the work of the Mediator, all the patriarchs and saints of old would have stood on the same level with ourselves. For they assuredly prayed not in dependence on their own righteousness, but their whole system of sacrifice, which preceded and went along with prayer, was a loud and continued confession that they ventured to hope for an answer to their petitions only through the merits of another. Hence it would follow that, if this were the full import of prayer in the name of Jesus, Abraham and Moses, and Daniel and David, and others, had already done so. But this our Lord expressly denies, and represents the exercise as something entirely new, as one of the blessed consequences of his advent, and chief privileges of the New Dispensation.

Every prayer in Christ's name implies trust in his merits; but it also implies something more. This is a sense of peculiar and gracious relation to the Father through him. If, in the painful consciousness of my desert of condemnation, I approach the Majesty of heaven, and place Christ before me as a shelter from the Divine vengeance, without which I know that God will be to me a consuming fire, I pray, indeed, in dependence on Christ's merits, but not in his name; I still think the Father strange, and distant, and unreconciled, and look upon myself as only protected by Christ from his wrath. But when I gain the delightful assurance of the eternal kindness of the Father, as the source of the glorious scheme of mercy, and feel that, through my union to his Son Christ Jesus, I too am become the son of his love; and when my deep consciousness of sin, and love of the Divine holiness are mingled and sweetened with the realizing sense of acceptance through Christ, and of the Father's love in him, my prayer is no longer servile but filial; no longer of the law, but of the gospel; no longer a drawing near to God as a still incensed enemy, but a drawing near to God in the name of Jesus. For what is it to do anything in any one's name, but to *represent* that person in the matter in question; and when thou thus actest in

my name, in making any request to a third party, it is not thou that askest, but more properly I. Thou receivest my authority; thou enterest upon my claims; so that if thou shouldst encounter a refusal, the disparagement falls entirely upon *me*; if thou shouldst succeed in thy request, the honour is done to *me*. If, then, Christ invites us to pray in his name, what is this but to encourage us with all humility and confidence to put ourselves in his place, and so far as the range of things agreeable to his will extends, to ask these of the Father, "in faith, nothing doubting." For then the ear of the Father will be as open to us as to him; our prayers will be as welcome and certain of answer as his Divine intercessions; our requests shall be as little rejected or delayed as those of Him whom "the Father heareth always." How amazing the privilege! and yet all this, and nothing less than this, is implied in the Saviour's promise.

He, then, that is enabled to appropriate the merits of his Surety, to stand with believing and grateful heart in that grace of adoption to which Christ has introduced him, and to bring his requests before the Father with holy boldness and confidence, prays in the name of Jesus. And in this wise the saints of the Old Testament had not prayed. Their view of the mediatorial work of Christ did not reach so far as to enable them, as Paul expresses it, "with a conscience made perfect," to draw near unto God. They knew, indeed, that for the sake of the Messiah, they should not be condemned; and in so far they rejoiced in their redemption. But, just as little as a pardoned criminal could infer, from the royal act of clemency, that he should be dressed in purple and fine linen and made to sit at the king's table; as little did they anticipate (though, perhaps, they had some vague and distant glimpse of it), that the whole merits of the Redeemer should become their own, and that they should have perfect and unbroken fellowship with "the Father, and his Son Christ Jesus." They had come to the mount which burned with fire, and unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest. Though

they all died in faith, "having obtained a good report through faith;" yet, "they received not the promise." Heb. xi. 39. How different is our situation? *We* have seen and heard "what many prophets and righteous men desired to see and were not permitted;" a blessed reality has taken the place of the dim shadow of "good things to come," and we can even enter into the startling language of our Lord respecting the Baptist, "That the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." We, therefore, can approach God with far different confidence, and pour out our hearts before him with a far other liberty; and are not surprised that the Lord speaks of prayer in his name, as a new thing, which has come with himself into the world.

And mark now the extent of this promise! It is ushered with the solemn words, "Verily, verily." These are the immutable oath, the royal seal of Him who is the Father's equal. "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you." And again, "Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." Here is a field opened without landmarks or limits. What can we desire more? Nothing in the world is so great, nothing so small, that we might not at any moment receive it from the Father, if we only asked it in the name of Jesus. Say, what would you desire to have granted you? Is it deliverance from domestic trouble? as, for example, that your sick child should recover? or, that your whole household should be converted to the Lord? Make known your desire to your Father in heaven in the name of Jesus, and if there is truth in the Bible, he will grant it you. But does not this seem contradicted by experience, besides involving on our part something like an invasion of God's Omnipotence? I answer, No! for wherever we have seemed to fail, the fault has been in ourselves; and it is only the Spirit of God who can produce in us that frame of desire, from which asking him in Christ's name proceeds. We must distinguish between a passing wish, and a desire of faith expressed in the name of Jesus. For example, though

you might wish the resurrection of a beloved friend, yet you could not bring your mind to pray for it, except under the guidance of the Spirit, and from the conviction that it was required by the glory of God ; but with such a conviction so wrought in you, you might pray for the miracle, and it would not be withheld. Thus Luther prayed for his friends Melancthon and Myconius, when they were sick unto death, and already given over ; and, behold, his prayer was answered of God ! Suppose that your heart was set upon silver and gold, if you could pray for them in faith, they would assuredly be yours. But could you pray for such things in the name of Jesus ! The pious Francke of Halle had grace given him to do so ; and straightway silver and gold flowed in upon him, so that he was able to build his Orphan House of the size almost of a city ; and he, who before had hardly a few pence of his own, was privileged to found an institution which was an honour to his age, and is still a blessing to his country. Remember the words of the apostle John, “ Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we *confidence* toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight,” 1 John iii. 21, 22.

What shall we say to these things ? Do they not lead us into the very sanctuary of Christian privilege, and reveal to us by a heavenly inspiration the splendour of our dignity as the sons of God, and cast a light of glory around every doctrine and promise of our ever blessed faith ! And oh, how these words rebuke our unbelief ! How few of us embark in this sacred ark of promise ! How poor and barren are our souls amid all the wealth of this spiritual treasury ! Were it otherwise, how different would every feature in our religious condition be ! The heavens would no longer be as brass over our heads, nor the earth beneath us as iron. The Church would flourish like the lily ; there would be a constant shaking among the dry bones, and the blessing would be poured out on us from above till there was not room enough to receive. Thus

our poverty in spiritual things is our condemnation. The mild reproof of Jesus applies too truly to ourselves, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name."

But much as these great promises reprove us, they also serve to revive and encourage us; for they open the blessed prospect, that the Church might at any time, by its united supplications, cause a better day to dawn. What more would be required for this result than that the little flock of Christ, pressed in spirit, and continuing, as of old, with one accord, in prayer, should not cease till a new pentecost were shed forth from on high, with a fresh illapse of spiritual power and gifts of the Holy Ghost! The Church of God, indeed, lieth waste; but the prayer of faith could repair its desolations; our congregations are, alas! dull and formal, but the prayer of one believing heart could break their lethargy; our friends are, many of them, still in the broad way; but could we now begin to pray for them in faith, "in faith, nothing doubting," "the accepted time, and the day of their salvation" would be come. Thus this word of promise can raise us to a calm height, where we breathe only the air of hope, and the view stretches bright and cheerful before us.

Let us learn, then, from this delightful promise to avoid, on the one hand, the error of praying in a legal and servile spirit, and, on the other hand, the still more pernicious and detestable error of neglecting prayer, on the pretence that we are already among the elect, and that all our wants are supplied by the intercession of Jesus. The former is unworthy of us, as disciples of the New Testament, and as reconciled to God by the death of his Son; the latter betrays a perversity of thought and deadness of spiritual affection, which can only arise from total irregnecy, or such deplorable backsliding as shews our alleged trust in Christ's intercession, and God's paternal care, to be an awful mockery and delusion. No! my brethren, we are made the children of God, that we may enjoy intercourse with our heavenly Father; we have a great High Priest over the house of God, that we may draw near

with true hearts, and in the full assurance of faith. And thus the two glorious truths hang together, that we owe all to the intercession of Christ, and yet that the intercession of Christ is itself the fruit of the Father's love. This we learn also from the passage which immediately succeeds that splendid promise to which we have devoted so much consideration; and with the quotation of it we return to our history, "At that day ye shall ask in my name, and I say not that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father himself loveth you because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God." John xvi. 26, 27.

III. We have said that the temper of mind in Elijah which led to his unconditional offer to Elisha, was not of the law but of the gospel, and in substance the same with that which we have just attempted to describe. How then was the proffer received? With a faith worthy of its own greatness, Elijah rose high in making it; Elisha still higher in his expectation from it. "I pray thee," says he, "let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me," that is, "I desire to be twice as much baptized with the Holy Ghost, and enriched with his gifts, as thou hast been." Let us not, however, mistake the excellent Elisha in his request. Loftily as it may sound, it proceeds from a humble and holy spirit. I cannot, indeed, suppose with many expositors that Elijah had here a reference to the birthright of the first-born son, whose share of the inheritance was double that of his brothers and sisters, and that he meant no more than this; "If others inherit a portion of thy spirit, let me, to whom thou hast been more especially a father, inherit a double portion." I see, rather, in these words, how great Elisha's estimate was of the loss which the church would sustain by Elijah's removal. The breach appeared to him irreparable; he thought the earth contained no man like him it was about to lose. And could *he*, the poor husbandman of Abel-meholah, born and bred for the plough, ever be fit to take the place, and that too in a time of universal degeneracy, of a spiritual champion

who had been without peer or rival, and whose name was to descend, in the highest rank of worthies, to the latest posterity ! Such were his thoughts ; and they were enough to stagger and overwhelm him. And if it was indeed the will of Jehovah that the succession should devolve on him, then he could not but pray that the prophetic endowments of Elijah should rest on him in double measure, since he was so unequal to him in natural gifts. This then is the language of the purest humility, of that humility which is in the sight of God “ of great price,” and which goeth “ before honour.” We may suppose, moreover, that he had already some vague idea that his future labours were to be essentially different from those of his great predecessor, and would bear a more evangelical character. The still small voice of Jehovah’s love and mercy was in him to succeed the storm and earthquake and fire of Elijah’s ministry ; and for this office he manifestly needed peculiar preparation and endowment. Deeper views of the divine love to sinners, and of the glorious plan of mediation through a Kinsman-Redeemer, must be vouchsafed him ; and his own character as a herald of the divine benignity be written as it were on his forehead, and shine in his countenance. No wonder, if he felt thus, that he uttered the request, “ Let a double portion of thy spirit be on me.”

But however unbounded his desires had been, they would still have been consistent with true humility, for he would have continued to acknowledge that he had nothing which he did not receive, and all would have been rendered back in homage and service to its Eternal Source. This would hold true of the Christian, though he should desire all the graces of all the saints to be united in his own person ; and the time will come in the annals of eternity when he may desire unspeakably more than this ; for he would still enjoy all in Christ, and would bind all into one wreath of glory, to lay at the feet of Him “ who alone is worthy.” Thus the utmost boldness of desire and the greatest depth of humility are sister graces that go hand in hand on earth and in heaven.

IV. Elisha's request makes his master for a moment startle. "Thou hast asked a hard thing," he replied; not as if the gift of miracles or other distinctions of the prophetic office could not be given in double or tenfold measure of that which he himself possessed. But probably from the evangelical character of the blessing asked, the prophet might have some remaining doubt that the granting of it was hardly compatible with the continuance of the old economy until the distant time of "restoration." He calmly submitted the whole matter to the decision of his Lord, and gave an outward sign by which it should be decided whether or no the great request were answered. This sign, given doubtless by inspiration of God, is itself remarkable. "If thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so." As if he had said, "The exaltation of such a mortal is itself a glorious anticipation of the work of pardoning love and grace, that shall mark that better dispensation into the spirit of which thou desirest to be baptized; if, then, thou beholdest the spectacle, thy prayer is already fulfilled; if thou dost not, then thou must still abide within the ancient limits of the present economy." The prayer of Elisha found acceptance with God; and under the opened heaven, into which his master gloriously ascended, he received, by the appointed sign, a renewed consecration to his exalted calling.

A brighter day has now dawned on us. That which was to Elisha an extraordinary sign, has become as common as the daily bread of the children of Zion. Every page of the New Testament is a cheering sign, that speaks more to us of the love of God to sinners than Elijah's ascension could do. O that we were fully conscious of our high prerogative, and enjoyed in all their richness the blessings of that better covenant of promise of which we are the heirs! May the love wherewith God embraces us in Christ Jesus be the element in which we live, and may we every moment of our being realize the gospel beatitude.—"Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear." Amen.



## IV.—THE ASCENSION.

There can be no doubt, my brethren, that the false theology of our times would not have occasioned half the mischief it has done, had it come everywhere in unmasked deformity as a direct contradiction of revealed truth. But as it assumed the specious garb of adherence to the fundamental doctrines of the Church, its course was easy. The unsuspecting people were unable to see through such delusion, and, ere they were aware, Satan, thus transformed into an angel of light, had triumphed over their faith and carried away the choicest treasures out of their sanctuary. It is true there was scarcely any of the articles of Scripture doctrine which was entirely suppressed; they were all given back to the people in a simpler and purer form than that of the old-fashioned catechisms and creeds of former centuries. The people, thus miserably deceived, stretched forth their arms to embrace the truth, and behold it was only a cloud! They thought to gather the flowers of paradise in their old seats, and lo! they were but artificial shows, without freshness, or fragrance, or life. These unhappy victims of false teaching have retained no doubt a Son of God; but so spiritualized and refined away, that it is hard to say whether he is a person or merely a personified idea, an unsubstantial image. True, they have a "Supreme Being" still recommended to their faith; but a Being so shadowy, etherial, and infinitely exalted above this world of ours, that they must renounce from the first all idea of close communion with him. A heaven, too, is left in name; but a heaven with which men can only be satisfied so long as they are not in earnest in pressing into it. They speak of immortal life, and a happy reunion of friends beyond the grave; but when the hour of need comes, the phantoms vanish, and the farther shore proves, as the bark of hope nears it, nothing but a collection of mists and vapours. Alas, poor deluded people! how sadly have ye forgotten the apostolic

warning, "Beware lest any man *rob* you through philosophy and vain deceit\*," Col. ii. 8. Away with this vaporized theology of our fashionable pulpits! Let us keep a fast hold of the reality of the Bible. He that takes it from us takes our all; for the heart of man needs and will have realities, and the more palpable and substantial they are the better. An incarnate God, that can be apprehended by my thoughts and laid hold of by my affections; a Surety that allowed himself, in the literal sense of the words, to be judged and punished in my stead; a special Providence that numbers the hairs of my head; a local heaven, peopled with visible and tangible forms; a conscious personal existence after death, and a reunion of the soul with its earthly partner, the body; these are some of the realities which my necessity loudly calls for, and without which my heart can never be satisfied. For all too real is the misery that weighs me down, the sin that burdens my conscience, and the death that clings to my very nature, that aught should prove to me a source of joy which is not as firm and solid in its texture. Can a paper shield avert the arrow that flies at my heart? No, I must have one of solid brass. Can a painted banquet appease my hunger? No, I must have substantial food, if I am to have my life preserved, and not my wants cruelly mocked.

I for one know exactly what I want; and am content to leave the chaff and husks of this world's wisdom to those who feel no need of stronger nourishment. My taste is for the solid realities of Bible truth. I confess that where I hear voices from the sky above, or see divine appearances in corporeal form, or the heaven opened as over the head of the martyr Stephen, that my heart, in such cases, finds its true satisfaction; and that the more palpable and substantial the things of a future life shew to my sight, the more gladly do I bid them welcome. I love the hopes that can be seen in broad day-light and take root in history, and I hold by such demonstrations of the immortality of

\* German version.

the soul, and of a life to come, as we are this day to witness. The reality I speak of is fully seen in the subject of this day's meditation—the ascent of Elijah in the chariot of fire. If there be any among you whose taste is like my own, it will be abundantly gratified on this occasion.

2 KINGS ii. 11.

“ And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder, and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.”

Here there is as it were a coronation-scene set before you. Here is an event surpassed in splendour by none in sacred history. Nor is it a spectacle in which you have no personal interest, since the glory of Elijah shall one day be your own. Let us consider: I. The light in which we should view this glorious event; II. The event itself; III. Its sublime import.

I. We return with you to the familiar scene beyond Jordan. This lonely spot was chosen for the miraculous scene by Him who knew better what was in man than to display it in the market-place of idlers, and who will not sink his condescension so far as to favour those with new wonders to whom the old have been a mere show, or an occasion of unbelieving doubt and ridicule.

It might be the calm hour of the first twilight of evening when the two men of God, absorbed in holy conversation, wandered over the silent scene. Their discourse was probably of Elisha's future mission, and of the faithfulness of their covenant-God. Elijah walks already with more than mortal tread, and a majestic soaring expression of fervent hope throws its halo around him. Nature, too, may have given signs of the approaching wonder, in the gathering of the curtained clouds of every radiant hue; the spreading of a universal stillness, broken only by a fitful rustle among the palms of the desert, and the louder murmur of the distant stream; and in the marshalling of her far-off thunders, which came with low and solemn sound, like a voice of welcome from another world, or peals to usher in an eternal Sabbath. We turn away, however, to muse on

the moral aspect of this grand preparation, and rise above the voice of Nature to the voice of God. It speaks of the approaching glory of one of the children of the dust, but warns us not to deify the flesh and blood that was to be thus exalted. It tells us that it is not the son of Adam, as such, who can inherit the kingdom of heaven; and that the coming triumph of Elijah is awarded to him, not as bearing the image of the earthly, but of the heavenly, but is a triumph of Divine mercy, of free sovereign grace, which has its ground and source in the merits of the second Adam, the Lord from heaven. It is a festival of grace in which the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world receives all the honour; a proclamation to angels and men and the powers of darkness, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased."

II. The great moment is come. The Lord is at hand. Elisha trembles with anxiety. His master looks exultingly upwards. The glowing clouds are rent, and from the fiery portal, there rides forth the chariot of salvation. Like a falling sun, or a star sent wandering from its place, or a blaze of linked thunderbolts, it darts its dazzling splendour afar; and wraps wild, and tree, and rock, and river, in one mantle of unearthly light. At length the bewildered eye descries the flaming chariot with its fiery horses wheeling down to earth. And now with arrowy-flight it has left the thunder-clouds behind, and rolled over the hills that shut in the wilderness; and an invisible guide has arrested its fire-breathing steeds by the prophet's side.

Let us turn aside, my friends, for a moment, to see this great sight. The eye of unbelief indeed may stay away. We regard not its distorted and darkling fancies. But even the eyes of believers see not here all alike true; but some have been blinded by the surpassing splendour. We reject their notions of a chariot of gilded clouds, mistaken for horses of fire, or of a host of angels linked together like a chariot, and bearing the prophet on high. This is plain and literal history; and why should we volatilize it into metaphor, or extend to it the freedom of speech which

exists in poetry. We find, indeed, in the 68th Psalm, the "angels of God" spoken of as "God's chariots." But this is no psalm, but a sober chronicle, composed in a style that does not mount on the wings of fancy, but walks with firm step on the earth. Let this conceited and unbelieving generation sport their miserable jeers at us as slaves of the letter, if they will, we hold fast by the literal chariot of fire and horses of fire, in the faith of simple and honest hearts, and we trust the veracity of Him who cannot lie. We need not trouble ourselves with the question whence these strange objects came, whether from the abodes of the blessed, or from some distant star or planet where there are other forms of being and laws of nature, or whether they were formed directly by the hand of Omnipotence, as perhaps also the dove that descended at our Saviour's baptism. On this I will not speculate, for I do not know; but this at least I know, that to judge of the world that lies above our experience by the laws of our own little planet, would be as foolish and absurd as to make the natural history of our own garden-plot a standard for the natural history of the globe. Let whoso will, then, shake his head, and boast of his enlightened scepticism; we are not faithless but believing. He gains nothing by his denial. How great our gain is from our decried superstition, even those who wrongfully revile us must themselves confess, from their fancied height of wisdom. While they leave such scenes with profane scoffs and empty hearts, we feast on hidden dainties and rejoice in our covenant God who counts his servants worthy of such glory! While they see only mist and vapour, we behold heaven opened and breathe its native air! While they bind the laws of their poor science, like iron fetters, around the hull of this earth, we mount by mysterious attractions above the stars, and walk already among the happy throngs of paradise! While they, curtained in by a thousand impenetrable folds of mystery, mutter forth their doubtful "To be or not to be;" we soar away on the wings of faith, and alight on the hills of immortality!

The prophet had marked the car of triumph without misgiving or dismay. Its sudden appearance gave him no shock, for his was now the love which "casteth out fear." In the twinkling of an eye he is caught away, and the fiery chariot again rolls upwards. Farewell, dark vales below, scenes of my struggles, of my tears ! Fast fly the heavenly steeds through cloud and airy sphere up to the flaming portal of the firmament. The last speck of earth is gone ; the prophet heeds it not ; his look is upwards ; his hands are stretched forth to a higher heaven ! And while he thus rides on up the boundless steep, his earthly body is transfigured into a higher form, and this mortal puts on immortality. So shall it be with the just who are caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Old things are now passed away, and death is swallowed up in victory. Who shall describe the new world which now opens to his glorified senses, the calls of welcome, the faces of brightness, the beckonings of triumph, that crowd around him ? A rapture and a beauty are there, a holiness and a love, with the overspreading charm of an immortal youth, before which the fairest of earth's dreams fade into dark and hollow shadows. And now the cloudy spheres are far behind ; and through the kindred æther that wraps suns and starry systems, the flaming horses urge their way. "The heavens declare the glory of God." "Great is the Lord and of great power," is the hymn which rises from the mystic choir on one side ; "All worlds are full of his glory" is the thousandfold response from the other. Soon stars fade, and vanish, and sink as in a bottomless abyss below ; and these new and thrilling strains, that now sweep down on his ravished ear, what are they ? They are far-off tones of the harps of seraphim around the throne of God. It is the Hallelujah of the heavenly host, the jubilee anthem of the "just made perfect." Elijah now weeps his last tears ; but they are tears of ecstasy, such as earth knows not ; and ere he enters heaven, heaven in its raptures has entered into his soul. The gates of pearl are wide unbarred ; and the New Jerusalem, for which his

heart had yearned night and day in the years of his mortal banishment, lies in the sunshine of its glory before him. And now the burning chariot is gone, and he is amid the green pastures and the verdant palms of paradise. Look round thee, thou blessed of the Lord! Here are the patriarchs, in whose steps thou trodest, to bid thee welcome! Here is father Abraham, to fold thee as a beloved son in his bosom; here is Moses, whose office thou didst bear, to greet thee; and the royal Psalmist to raise a new song of triumph! Vain the call! he hears nothing, sees nothing. One glory has eclipsed all others, and he is already prostrate in silent ecstasy before the throne of God. Let us retire and leave him there. For us, there is no dwelling long in that upper world. We must return to the vale of tears; but we take back with us heaven in our hearts, and learn something of its song to cheer our pilgrimage in this strange land.

“ Sick at heart, of exile weary,  
Nought I see but thickening gloom;  
Hide me soon from tempest dreary,  
Lord! in peaceful halls of home.”

III. The ascension of Elijah is incontestably one of the most glorious, delightful, and significant facts which the world ever witnessed before the birth of Christ. Like a bright star of hope in the cloudy sky of the ancient dispensation, it sent down its cheering radiance through many centuries; and in the light of it, the saints of God went on their pilgrimage with renewed strength. It was a prop of their faith in a life to come, a proof by fact of the reality of things unseen and eternal. How many a death-bed may it have comforted; how many a soul upheld by the thought that he, whose life was so gloriously closed on earth, had once sat like them under the juniper-tree, and poured out his complaint to the rocks of the wilderness. This may have filled up the dark void which, in spite of offering and sacrifice, opened before the troubled conscience, and given them such a view of the paternal love of God to sinners, that they henceforth rose above their

despondency, and were no longer, "through fear of death, subject to bondage."

But not only was this event like a rainbow of promise over the dark clouds of the former economy, it also looked forward to that better dispensation which was to come "in the fulness of time." It was unquestionably a type and figure of the glorious entrance of the Great High-Priest into the true sanctuary, when he passed through these heavens, having obtained eternal redemption for us. And though, to the eye of sense, it may seem at first as if the type were more glorious than the antitype, a little reflection will teach us how truly in this respect, as in every other, "He that cometh from heaven is above all." No fiery chariot was to bear the Saviour upward; but he was to ascend by his own inherent power, in simple and silent majesty, and like one whose steps were accustomed to a higher path, and whom all the elements obeyed. As is the difference between the unadorned greatness of a monarch, and the gorgeous and manifold trappings of his retinue; such was the difference between the ascension of the sinful servant, and that of the Lord from Heaven, the Son of God.

Even for us, the children of the better dispensation, this mighty event opens a spring of true consolation, and stands out in bold and strong colours like a great fresco-painting, in which the vigour of the outline but gives us a more vivid idea of the realities of another life. From the beginning of the world until now, the soul of man has found the world too narrow for its desires. To be shut up within the sphere of things mutable and transitory, and to share itself the common lot of dissolution;—this has ever been an intolerable thought to man, which he has struggled by all means in his power to exchange for a more cheering hope. At one time on the wings of fancy, at another on those of speculation, he has striven to pass without the circle of this visible earth, and to discover, for certain, an invisible and eternal sphere beyond, by faith in which he might soothe the sorrows of the present hour, and into



which the soul might be received in safety, after the great shipwreck of the body. This struggle to pierce the veil, and burst the brazen doors of the prison-house, has been renewed in every nation, in every clime and in every age. But what is the fruit of all these painful efforts? Merely to prove, first, that man in all conditions and stages of civilization feels, however vaguely, the immortality of his being, and his destination for a life beyond the darkness of the grave and the horrors of corruption; and, secondly, that man, when left to prove this truth by reason, has ever erred, and cast his darkened eye around for light in vain, and striven in vain to push aside the bars which the hand of the Eternal alone can move. Look to the men of the ancient world, who stood on the very summit of philosophic insight, and consider how little way they advanced in their knowledge of a future state. Cyrus, who had been educated in the schools of the most illustrious Persian sages, said, on his death-bed, to his children, "I cannot imagine that the soul lives only so long as it remains in this mortal body, and ceases to live when it is separated from it. *I am rather inclined to think*, that it will then have more intelligence and greater purity!" Socrates, the greatest of the philosophers of Greece, when his last hour was at hand, could only say to his judges, "We are about to part. I go to die, you to live; which of us goes the the best way is known to God alone." Cicero, the great and polished Roman, could say no more than this, "I do not wish that what I am about to say of a future life, should be regarded as certain, like a Divine oracle. Upon this subject I only advance conjectures!" And, if you will believe me, the wise men of the present day have no better staff to lean upon, in so far as they forsake the stable ground of Scripture. They also fluctuate between doubt and certainty, between hope and fear; and their belief, where they have one in a future life, is, in most cases, so barren and comfortless, that death puts all their confidence to shame, and, by the first light stroke of his dart, breaks their frail shield into a thousand shivers.

Now, into the midst of these wise men of the world, who can produce as the fruit of some thousand years speculation, nothing better than a barren and hesitating conjecture, that there is, *perhaps*, a future state, and an eternal existence of the soul in it, the Christian comes forward with beaming eye and uplifted look, and exclaims in triumph, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" "*We know*," he can declare with firmness and decision, "*We know*, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." And, if you ask him the ground of this knowledge and joyful hope, he refers you not to the loose and sandy foundation of dreams, and presentiments, and probabilities, and speculations; but to the word of One, in whose mouth men and devils in vain endeavoured to find deceit; One, who confirmed his words by deeds of Divine majesty; One who, in proof that death cannot retain his prey for ever, approached the tombs of the dead and called them back to life by a word, and One who established his doctrine of immortality, not only by the fact of an ascension like Elijah, but on the unspeakably stronger pillar of his own resurrection from the dead before he was exalted to glory. Hear him when he says, "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am there ye may be also." Here then is the cloudy veil withdrawn, and the barriers that separate time from eternity thrust aside by a mighty hand; while all that we have to do is to behold and rejoice at the magnificent prospect. True, indeed, the glory thus discovered can be seen only by that wonderful eye which we call FAITH. But how firm and distinct and stedfast may the view of Faith be, when she looks through the glass of a sure word of truth, spoken by Him in whose life and history is every moment revealed the Lord from heaven! And where then

does he, who is as familiar with the world of spirits as with the gross realities of earth—where does he direct our longing hopes? Is it, like the wisdom of this world, to a dark and boundless void? Is it to far distant shadows that flit in the horizon? to words without knowledge of an ocean of spirit, into which the souls of men are to be re-absorbed? or to deep riddles respecting an existence out of the limits of space and time? Oh no. It is to something which is distinct and apprehensible and near at hand. It has shape and body, and a clear outline and a lively colour; and if we believe in it, we know at least in *what* we have believed. The Author of our Faith shews us, behind the clouds, no dreary and immeasurable expanse, no empty and shapeless pile of vapours, in thinking of which we should rather feel glad to keep still by the solid earth. He shews us something which we can live in and feel ourselves at home—a house, a mansion, a paternal home. Do you say, “These are but figures.” No doubt they are; but there lies under them a deep reality, and they are not mere oratorical flourishes and strokes of fancy. Verily heaven is no building with roof and walls. But it is a local region, a peopled spot, a place of habitation, where friend knows friend, and enjoys all the delights of close and enduring relationship. The expression, “My father’s house,” points to a family community, a confiding intercourse, a living with, and beside a common Father, where all is love, and peace, and joy; and this is the substance, the sober reality of the image. O how precious is the thought, that we have so sure intelligence of this house in heaven, and that when we are a-weary of this world of sorrow, and would flee away and be at rest, our souls can escape through those chinks in the prison-house which let in the light of heaven, and soar away to the regions of the blest. How does it do the heart good, in the midst of this mortal toil and struggle, to know of a land where peace for ever reigns; in the midst of this drooping, and fading, and reign of death, to know of a world without blight or decay; in the midst of the fierce and jarring

tumult of earth, to rejoice in a scene where all is conspiracy and blessed harmony; and from the stormy billows of a changeful life, to look to a quiet haven where all storms are hushed, and whence there is no more voyaging abroad into the distracted deep! How cheerfully does such a glimpse of glory impel us onward through the vale of tears! Dark as is our earthly dwelling-place, the air of heaven now plays around it, and enters into it; and though the range of our feet be still confined, our heart is abroad in boundless spheres. The blue canopy of heaven is now a vapour which hangs around the sunny hills of the "land that is afar off;" the stars are but the twinkling lamps of the city of our God; and the moon is but a silent sentinel that softly beckons the pilgrim on, "ordained to guide the unbodied spirit home from toilsome life to never-ending rest."

Yes, in the triumphal ascent of Elijah, we see only a reflected image of the glory that awaits all the people of God. As the whole flock follows the leader, when the "appointed time" of the crane and stork is come, so shall we also, after the prophet, rise on the wings of faith and love to a happier clime; as the first bud of spring announces the approaching verdure of the whole tree, so he announces a general spring-time to all who are grafted into the True Vine. Yes, we shall follow thee in thy adventurous path! The true Precursor has broken up our way. For us there may be no fiery chariot; but the ministry of angels shall be ours, and who can tell what besides?

We take leave of this splendid and heart-elevating picture; but I cannot pass from it, without drawing aside the curtain that veils an equally real and more stupendous scene. Behold! what a spectacle is this! A dismal hill of death—a bloody tree of agony, with thickest night around, and the cry and groan of anguish from amid the gloom. Truly this is another sight than that we have just gazed on in the wilderness. Here is a righteous man nailed to the cross; there a sinner ascends to glory. Here the inno-

cent is compassed round with the "sorrows of death" and "the pains of hell"—there the guilty triumphs in a chariot of fire. Here the "brightness of the Father's glory" sinks in the night of death—there a criminal, deserving to die, passes without tasting of death into the joys of paradise. Here the Lamb of God bleeds by the sword of avenging justice—there a creature of the dust is welcomed as a child of God to the arms of mercy. What startling contrasts, and, to the natural mind, perplexing riddles! And yet they are bound together by a deep inward harmony. For the one depends upon the other, and finds in it its true explanation. Christ assumed the sinner's place. He became "sin" for Elijah; and thus Elijah became the "righteousness of God in him!" He took on himself the sinner's punishment; the sinner becomes partaker of his glory. He has drunk the sinner's cup of trembling; the sinner receives from his hand the cup of blessing. It is this marvellous substitution of Immanuel in the sinner's stead that clears up all difficulties in the Divine procedure, and shews how a sinner may ascend to the highest heaven.

Here, then, we leave for the present the bright scene of ascension. And in what better frame can we depart, than by joining in the heavenly chorus of angels and spirits of the just made perfect, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and glory, and honour, and blessing." Amen.

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#### V.—THE PARTING CALL.

When we read, in Mark xvi. 16, that Jesus "upbraided his disciples with their unbelief;" we read of something that has happened not once in the history of the world, but times innumerable. Nothing did the Saviour so often smite with the "sword of his mouth" as unbelief; and with the strongest reason. For it is the source of all sin, and causes the forfeiture of all saving blessings. It bars

at once the door of heaven, and wreathes around our necks the yoke of the Prince of darkness.

O, it is a detestable thing, this sin of unbelief, on whatsoever side we contemplate it ! It can do nothing but darken, and degrade, and destroy. It extinguishes all the lights of the spiritual world, and spreads around a night and chaos, out of which all foul and monstrous shapes of evil are born. What does unbelief make of the world ? A barren and cheerless waste, where no sound of Divine footsteps is heard ; no angels ascend and descend ; no living hand clothes the fields, and feeds the birds of the air, and regulates the events of life, but where one dull play of mechanism succeeds another ; and where, instead of an inner spirit of life, a dead law of nature sets all things in motion and there is no room for a special providence of love mysteriously to control all. Thus it changes the world into a great field of the dead, and makes of nature, the garden of the Lord, an immense automaton ; of history, that grand development of a manifold counsel of God, a fortuitous concourse of accidents ; of man, the pupil of a Divine training, a creature without other rule of life than chance and self-will ; and of prayer, an absurd and useless ceremony. It disrobes the world and the life of man of every great and exalting aspect ; it annihilates even the vestiges of heaven that are yet upon the earth, and bars the outlet to every higher region.

But faith comes to re-open the intercourse between earth and heaven. She peoples the world, and the scenes of our life, with high and glorious visitants. She sees an invisible world dawn upon the visible ; and to her eye the earth is a theatre of incessant wonders and mighty acts of God. Everywhere she traces the interference, and working, and ruling guidance of an exalted Trinity. In the winds she sees his messengers, and his ministers in the flames of fire. She has the wings of angels for a dweller in the dust ; and for the prisoner of time, the key that " opens the palace of eternity."

Great and wonderful, indeed, is the force of the mind

of man when, in the words of an eloquent author, "with more marvellous threads than those on which the insect darts into the light air, and is borne by the wind over vale and mountain, he stretches the web of his thoughts from star to star, and from galaxy to galaxy, and calculates distances, which his own measuring line, at the speed of light, would take thousands of years to traverse." And yet how feeble and infant-like does this same mind appear, amidst all its reach and loftiness, when it fails to raise one of those bright curtains of that spiritual world, on whose borders it treads, and has to confess that, though its own limits are not the boundaries of truth, but the walls that partition off some great and mysterious regions of the universe, it can neither overpass these nor remove them out of the way. Shut up in its own little pen-fold of a world, it must forego all lofty contemplation of a Spirit that is above all, and turn its ignorant gaze on what is but the veil and outer covering of his glory. The sage must first become as a little child, and sit in lowly docility by the word of revelation. Only at the feet of Jesus is this spiritual wisdom to be learned. Of that man only, be he wise or ignorant, who has comprehended the light of His doctrine, can it be said, "The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth."

2 KINGS ii. 12.

"And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces."

The man of God, whom we have so often attended in his eventful course, and who has so mightily excited our admiration and our love, is no more to be found in the land of mortals. He has shaken off the dust of earth, and Elisha, his faithful companion, is now to be seen alone in the wilderness near Jordan. How deep and peculiar his feelings must have been, on this occasion, we cannot in words describe. Yet his conduct, as here re-

corded, opens a slight view into the depths of his agitated heart. Let us consider, I. Elisha's Last Look. II. His Parting Call. III. His Expression of Grief.

I. Elisha beholds with trembling heart the sublime spectacle of his master's translation; and his heart almost sinks under the awful and imposing grandeur of the scene. Who can picture the excitement of the forsaken man? Is he really awake? Is it only a vision of his fancy? For a moment he might doubt his senses; but he finds himself still in the wilderness and alone; the mantle of the ascended Elijah has floated down, and his hands touch and handle it. No; it is no vision, it is all reality. His friend, his spiritual father, soars in very deed yonder through the air; as really as Noah floated in his ark on the waters, or as Moses and the children of Israel passed, dryshod, through the waves of the Red Sea. But who had ever seen such a sight! Truly it needed a Divine supporting hand, to keep him from sinking in this the most solemn and momentous hour of his life.

Happy was Elisha in "having seen," still more happy in "having believed." Happiest of all are we, if by the eye of faith we see, and in our hearts believe, the great truth taught in Elijah's ascension, and are not among the "wise and prudent, from whom these things are hidden." For there are men who, "having eyes, see not; and having ears, hear not!" and who, when the Father gives testimony concerning his Son from heaven, "I have glorified thy name, and will glorify it again," can only say "it thundereth," and hear neither divine nor angelic voice. Let us not forget also, that, as Elisha's great request was answered in seeing the display of God's love to sinners in Elijah's translation itself, as well as by the dropping of the mantle, so we also receive the spirit of the New Testament by looking in faith on another and greater ascension, and by the shedding forth of the gifts of the Holy Ghost which follow it.



II. Elisha gazes in devout wonder on the ascending chariot. An exalted joy, indeed, and hopes unknown before, must then have sprung up in his breast. But the sense of unutterable loss overpowers all, and he cries after the ascending prophet, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" Never was the word "father" pronounced on earth with greater depth of feeling or affectionate tenderness. There is something urgently sad in the cry, as if he would call his master back to earth. And this is almost unexpected by us, who have been accustomed to look on Elijah almost exclusively as a son of thunder. Certainly, if we have attended to our feelings, it has not been confiding affection, but reverential awe, with which he has inspired us by the majesty and fiery earnestness of his public appearances. But Elisha, who had seen the workings of the heart which beat under the hairy mantle and heavenly armour of proof, knew better what manner of man Elijah was; and in his eyes the *prophet* had not overshadowed the *man*. O how much had Elisha lost in him! How instructive did he find his company! how soothing and full of care his friendship! Though accustomed so much to what was elevated and supernatural, how great was his interest in all, however trifling, that concerned his friend; and if at one moment he stood terrible on the scene of conflict with the drawn sword of the Spirit in his hand, he had been ready the next to gather the little ones, the humble and the teachable, under the wings of his love, and to welcome the timid to his embrace! Yes, Elisha's loss could not be told. The sweetest and most valuable hours in his life had been spent in his society. O what recollections would hover about his soul! What struggling emotions of desire and affection and gratitude and regret are poured forth in the parting call, "My father, my father!"

"The chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" or, "Thou wast Israel's artillery and cavalry," its glittering legion and its invincible host. What a noble testimony! And yet what is it but a true likeness of that man whom

God had made as an iron bulwark about Zion, and an armed host against Israel's foes? Think of the fire that was ready to descend at his prayers against Jehovah's enemies, of the ruin that by a word he hurled against the priests of idolatry. Think of the awful thunder which rolled from his lips against the blasphemer, the power of look, and of mere presence, by which he quelled the strongest and proudest spirits of his time. He spake, and the horse and his rider stood thunderstruck; he threatened, and tyrants recoiled, pale and mute and trembling. He commanded in the name of God, and a whole royal family that set themselves against the Lord were rooted out by fire and sword. He was wroth in spirit, and his wrath became a consuming flame which burnt up a whole host of lying priests from the land of Israel. And what a wall of defence was this man around the believers in the land! How did he encourage the trembling and scattered flock by word and deed! How did he throw himself into the breach to save their faith; and, like a champion, put forth every effort, by exhortation and example, to keep them stedfast in God's covenant! And Elijah was not only their champion and standard-bearer, he was their shield and breastplate, defending them from the malice of tyrants, and proving himself more terrible to them than whole armies of Philistines and Syrians. And this man was gone! The phalanx of Israel and its bulwark were removed! and what might be the consequence? Who would now take the lead in the cause of God, and oppose his breast to the foe? O, irreparable loss! Alas, Elijah, that thou hast left us so soon! "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof!"

It is long since the Church of God has seen men deserving of this highest of titles; the days in which we live are evil; while, on the other hand, it seems as if the kingdom of darkness would never fail in champions and heroes. Yet the predicted time will come, when "The Lord of hosts shall visit his flock, the house of Judah, and make them as his goodly horse in the battle; and they shall be

as mighty men, who tread down their enemies as the mire in the streets," Zech. x. 3—5. But till then our motto must be, "Here is the patience of the saints;" nor must we forget the old lines:—

"Once the cedar and the palm  
Marked the soul for glorious deeds;  
But in this, the better time,  
Fragile vines and bruised reeds."

Still, however, in a certain sense, the honourable appellation of "the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof," belongs even now to all the faithful and righteous, and especially to those who, in the spirit of the New Testament, abound in prayer and intercession with God. Mark how the prayer of Lot suspended the destruction of Sodom; the prayer of Moses procured the slaughter of Amalek, and the prayer of Samuel brought down the thunders of heaven on the Philistines, and routed them with a great overthrow. Such is the power of believing prayer. For it lays hold of the Divine promise, and thereby engages Omnipotence on its side. It defends cities, decides battles, arms warriors, stops the mouths of lions, turns to the flight the armies of the aliens, restrains judgments, and divides the waves of the sea. Happy the place where such believers dwell! That is better for it than walls of brass, and ramparts of rock. Happy the church whose pastors are "the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." They are Israel's chariot, when they, like Moses once, rise with you on the fiery wheels of intercession through clouds of darkness to the throne of grace; they are "the horsemen thereof," when they fall upon your hearts with the charge, "Thou, thou art the man." They are Israel's chariot, when, with holy boldness, they ride over and beat down every high place among you that the Lord alone may be exalted; they are Israel's horsemen, when, in the armour of God, they take the field for you day and night against Satan and his seducing spirits. Pray, my friends, for your own sakes, that your teachers may have such an unction from the Holy One, and that you may be able, when

they are no more, to inscribe upon their tombstone to the praise of God, "The chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof."

III. The last faint trace of the fiery chariot is gone; Elisha's eye gazes no longer upwards; he looks around, and feels that he is indeed alone. Will no second chariot come to bear him also above this vale of tears and of the shadow of death? "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, and dwell in the tents of Kedar." Such is the language of his heart, as he rends his clothes "in two pieces," exclaiming, "My father, my father!"

We are not in a condition fully to understand and sympathize with Elisha's grief, as we have never been called to mourn over the departure of an Elijah. We must have witnessed the death of a Luther, or a Calvin, or stood by the grave of John Arnot, a Franke, or a Bengel, in order to feel the depth of sadness which makes Israel exclaim, "How are the mighty fallen; how are the weapons of war perished!" We must imagine what it is to lose a beloved father or a tender mother out of a family, and then apply this to the whole church of the saints.

Elisha's grief could not be of very long duration. Hope, like a guardian angel, must soon have revisited his soul; and in the blessed prospect of a speedy re-union to his lost master, he must have risen above his sorrows. And so shall it be with us, when, from the death-beds of pious friends, where heaven seems opened above us, and we almost hear the sound of the receding chariot of fire, we must return as from the gates of paradise to dwell a little longer in the wilderness. "Let patience have her perfect work;" ere long the time will come. The hour of our departure may strike sooner than we imagine, and introduce us to the bosom of Eternal Love.

But thou, poor soul, that hast no longing for home—thou unconverted soul, that despisest the blood of the cross and followest another standard than that of Calvary—thou, too, must take thy last journey; and whither, O,

whither does it lead? Thou hast heard the devils exclaiming, "Lord Jesus, send us not into the deep," and their cry shall one day be thine own. Now thou walkest in thine own way, gay and thoughtless, and sayest to thyself, "Peace! peace, when there is no peace," and, "There is no danger," while yet the danger is appalling, though thou knowest it not, or wilt not consider it. On the clock of eternity thine hour is struck; but no angel descends to bear thee away; no mansion of peace is opened for thee; no crown of life is wreathed for thy head. Thy name stands not in the book of life. Ah, thine angel of death has no peaceful look, no mild and cheering voice. On thy bed of death, no friendly hands bear thee up; but the ministers of justice rudely seize thee; thou fallest not asleep, but goest thine own way to the place of execution. Ha, what mean those starts of agony, those looks of fixed despair, those chill drops that bedew thy sinking head? Is this godly sorrow, is this repentance? Yes; it is the repentance of Judas, of Ahab, of Cain; it is the remorse of hell, without faith; it is the pressure of guilt, without movement towards God; it is a fearful looking for of judgment, without hope from the Judge; a shuddering at eternity, without one recourse to the prayer of faith, or one struggle of the soul to embrace the crucified One. Unhappy sinner, who can help thy sad case! We preach to thee, thou understandest not; we point thee to the blood of the Lamb, thou wilt not raise thy heavy eyes; we name to thee the name of Jesus, thou canst only tremble. We would pray with thee, but thou givest no sign of assent. And oh, should this not be thy state, but shouldst thou advance so far into the dark entrance, dull, and hardened, and blind to all that lies beyond; yet, as thy senses fail thee, and thine eye darkens, and thine ear is shut, and the world is all behind thee, then another scene will open, a strange world of gloom, and ghastliness will rise around thee, and thou wilt feel that thou art all alone—alone with thy sins—alone with thy burdened heart—alone with thy boding terrors—alone in the thick dark cloud of death!

Alone—yet not alone! For thou hearest whispers that make thy naked spirit quiver; a spiteful hissing and a bitter laughter, that tells thy quaking heart into what hands thou art betrayed and sold for ever. And when thy pulse beats no more, and the last death-rattle is breathed from thy throat, and thy soul leaps forth with one cry of anguish from the body, thou then knowest where thou art, for now thou seest the spirits of darkness. Ah, the hideous looks that stare on thee all round, hardened by the crimes of long ages; and they only mock and triumph in thy misery! Thy prayers, thy tears, thy adjurations, thy mad reproaches of thy accursed convoy avail thee not. With fiendish mockery they tell thee, “That thy lot is of thine own choosing; that thou mightest as readily have fled to the cross as joined their banner; that honour calls thee to play out thy part.” And so they drag thee forth on thy dismal journey through a ravaged world, which no God repairs; an utter wilderness, still as the grave, and dark, without sky or solitary gleam of star; thy downward way carries thee from depth to depth, and the darkness grows ever denser, the silence ever more drear, and broken only by the rush of infernal wings, or the grating thunder of doors that close on thee for ever; and thy poor soul’s distress is ever sadder and sadder, and darker than all the night that wraps thee round. Ah, these piercing sounds that break upon thee from the far depth, what mean they? They are the weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, of which on earth thou heardest the Saviour speak. And now thou art beside them, and seest their ghastly faces; each more dismal than the other, and upon all the same despair and madness; and from every lip, nothing but self-cursing and blasphemy. Ah, who shall save them from their undying worm, or put out their unquenchable fires! There is Judas, the traitor, tossed to and fro like a cloud of night, wringing his hands and crying for annihilation, but crying in vain. There is Cain, the fratricide, grovelling in the deepest abyss; and though he digs downward in search of death, he cannot find it.

There is Nero, the blood-hound of persecution. Such is thy company ; but here no one cares for others ; for all are buried in their own woes, and all hearts are of stone, except to the pangs of their own torment. And as thou quailest at the sight, and wouldst turn away, the pangs of hell lay hold on thee, and thou feelest a wave of anguish break upon thy soul, to which the direst sufferings of earth would be a respite of peace. It is a mystery of horror, unimagined, nameless, unutterable ! and no deliverer, far or near ; no more sacrifice for sin ; and for pity, there is bitter mockery ; and for comfort, the hellish taunt, “ See thou to that ! ” Love has fled these dark abodes ; and the night is too thick, alas, even for a ray of hope. Here no clock strikes to mark the passing away of an hour of sorrow ; no dawn follows the midnight of despair, to give promise of a better day. Here that scene becomes a sad reality, which a dark imagination has pictured with colours so fearfully true. One lost spirit meets another, and asks him, in rueful despair, “ What of the clock ? ” He answers, “ Here are no minutes, no hours, no years, no ages, no time at all ; but only one long, awful, never-ending eternity. Here is only one great clock, that has no dial, no hands, no numbers ; only a pendulum that swings on with one dull beat of thunder, EVER—NEVER. EVER Damnation—NEVER Redemption ! Here the name of a Father, a God, that was written on all upon earth, in storm as in sunshine, in waste as in fruitful field, and which makes earth, in the retrospect, a very paradise, is to be read no more. Shall it be written on the chains of darkness that know no breaking, on the smoke of torment that ascendeth up for ever and ever ? ” In the dread flames that cannot be quenched by floods of tears ? In the wail of despair that finds no answer ? O God of justice ! in hell there is written on the dungeon walls, and the hearts of the prisoners, nothing but this sentence, “ Our God is a consuming fire.” Alas ! poor soul, that must learn, by eternal trial, the awful depth of this word ; with what shout of joy wouldst thou hear, but for once, in that place, what thou hast so often

heard on earth, "Be ye reconciled unto God," and see the curse and blessing once more put within thy choice. But no. The curse alone is thy eternal portion. No God cares for thee more, no Saviour seeks after thee, no day of grace dawns on thee; and escape from these realms of sin and death is barred against thee, not for long ages merely, but for ever and ever!

Alas! Alas! what a picture is this compared with that scene which we lately dwelt upon with rapture. Then it pained us to leave the blessed abodes of light, into which we followed in thought the triumphant prophet, and return to this vale of tears. But now we could almost break into shouts of joy, that the way is still open for our return to the earth and the day of grace. Again we hear, instead of the yell of demons and the wailings of despair, the voice of God calling us to repentance. Instead of the devouring fire, we see the arms of mercy still opened, as wide and gracious as ever, to receive us. All, however, has its time and its season. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." "Kiss ye the Son, lest he be angry and ye perish from the way when his wrath is kindled but a little." One of two things must close our pilgrimage; an ascent to heaven or a descent to hell. There is no middle state. "Have mercy upon us, O Saviour. Jesus, thou Lamb of God, have mercy upon us." Amen.

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## VI.—THE LEGACY.

Our faith in a Millenium rests not only on the sure word of prophecy, but also on the disorders of the Church in the present day, and the destitute state of the world. Without it the issues of Redemption would appear incomplete; the mediation of Christ less powerful than the influence of the prince of this world. But for this we would be inconsolable for the loss of the Pentecostal church, and even the great spiritual heroes of the earlier dispensation would be contemplated by us with humiliation and shame. Those



therefore are to be blamed who despise the study of prophecy, who seek not to complete the mutilated figure of church history by adding to it the proportions and members that lie scattered in the predictions of good things to come, and who shut their ears to the sounds of His approach, who has promised to "come quickly." As for myself, I confess, that, if the prospect of a speedy dawn of these blessed days had not supported me, I should never have been emboldened to take you back into that age in which Elijah and Elisha lived and acted so gloriously. But as it is, I look with calm and unenvying eye upon these bright forms of the ancient dispensation, for greater saints and heroes are yet to come.

2 KINGS ii. 13—15.

"He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan; and he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah? And when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither; and Elisha went over. And when the sons of the prophets, which were to view at Jericho, saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him."

We come this day to an interesting act. The will of the departed prophet is unsealed; and Elisha is the heir of an inheritance the like of which the world has seldom seen. Let us contemplate the happy man somewhat more closely in the enjoyment of his heritage, and consider Elisha, I. With Elijah's Mantle. II. With Elijah's God. III. With Elijah's Spirit. IV. In Elijah's Office.

I. In the moment when Elijah was taken up in his fiery chariot, his mantle, loosened by an invisible hand, fell from his shoulders, and floated down before Elisha. This was but a trifling circumstance in itself; but, as a symbol, of too much importance to be overlooked. With his mantle, Elijah had cast off for ever the burden and dignity of his commission. In the world above there are no more teachers and prophets, for faith is swallowed up in vision. Elisha was at no loss to understand the sign. When formerly he cast his mantle on Elisha at Abel-meholah, it was no more

than a preparatory call to the prophetic office. Now, however, he is called upon to take the place of his great master, and to continue his work. The mantle came flying towards him heavily laden. But, with the grave commission which it brought, was united the pleasing encouragement of having received it thus from such a master. This mantle was the remembrancer of mighty deeds, like a banner that had long waved in fields of victory ; and not only so, it was the robe of a blessed heir of heaven borne thither on the wings of cherubim. The kindness and love of God to sinners would now be signified by it to Elisha's mind ; and thus would refresh his spirit in his arduous office, and mark him out as that gracious messenger of peace, who was to announce to the house of Israel, like a rainbow after a storm, the good will of God to men.

It was also a circumstance of importance for Elisha, that the mantle of office he was forthwith to wear, was cast to him as it were from the open heavens. In what light could he regard this, except as an immediate investiture and vocation on the part of the living God. And should not every mantle of office now carry the same significance ? Should not all preachers, and teachers, and missionaries, and all others that labour in the Lord's vineyard, be able to say, with Elisha, " I have received my commission from heaven ; my call is of God ? " But, in the present day, people commonly make the mantle themselves, esteeming it an idle fancy that aught should fall from heaven but rain and snow, and looking upon the sacred office of a minister as a profession, like any other, into which any one may be put for " a morsel of bread." The parents decide for their child in his cradle, " We shall make a minister of him." The vain young student, especially if he be conscious of possessing some small talent, immediately concludes that his sphere is the pulpit. Too many of our young men enter the universities and devote themselves to the study of theology, without the most distant thought of asking counsel of God as to the matter of their choice ; and nowhere is an Elijah to be found to take them aside and inquire

whether they have any better proof of their call than their own good opinion of themselves and the counsel of flesh and blood. Hence it is that we have now the mournful spectacle of a church before our eyes, in which grievous wolves fill the shepherds' office, and the inconsistency of the clergy is a common matter of scandal and hindrance to the gospel. Is it strange, that, in such circumstances, the common mariner should sometimes seize the helm, when the pilot knows not how to govern the ship? The denouncers of lay agency would do well to consider that they are only opposing what they themselves, however much against their will, have called into existence.

II. After Elisha had taken up the mantle in the name of the Lord, he commences his return to Jericho, much excited, and yet of good comfort; for not only Elijah's mantle, but Elijah's God remains with him. This he doubts not; but where is the faith which no longer requires no seal. "Shew me a token for good," saith the psalmist; and what prayer of his is oftener repeated by the saints than this? This prayer was in the heart of Elisha as he approached the banks of Jordan. He must pass over—Elijah is no longer at his side. And the mantle in itself is nothing. Elijah's God must manifest himself. He takes the hairy mantle, wraps it up as he had seen his master do, and with it he smites the waters of Jordan, invoking the Almighty from heaven, and saying, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" What shall we say, my friends, to this call? Is it too bold and confident? No, it only shews how greatly the miracle in the wilderness had strengthened his faith in the Most High. Is it a tempting of God? No! it is a holy and blameless reliance on his Providence. Does it partake of unbelief? No! the language is that of doubt; but the spirit is that of faith. And if it seem to speak impatience, the importance of the event and the occasion removes all appearance of this evil. "He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God."

The reason why Elisha invoked the God of Elijah was this, that he had received for his inheritance not only the mantle, but also the God of Elijah. Thus God was the portion of Isaac by inheritance, and afterwards of Jacob. To believers, also, of after ages God revealed himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ; and thus promised them the blessings which he had conferred on these patriarchs, and assured them that he would bear them in his hands with the same faithfulness. Hence the Old Testament saints directed all their prayers to the God of their fathers ; and found, in the original covenant made with Abraham, a deep source of comfort and hope. And to whom do we direct our prayers ? Thrice happy are we who have seen God manifest in the flesh, to whom we can pray with a degree of confidence which the saints of old could never possess. We know that every act of kindness done by our Lord to sinners, in the days of his flesh, was designed to be a pattern of what he will do in all times to those that seek him. We then can look with more confidence to God as thus revealed in the person of his Son ; and how does it strengthen our faith when sin weighs us down, or when poverty and want oppress us, to be able to say " Where is the God of the penitent malefactor ? Where is the God of Martha, and Mary, and of Lazarus ? Where is the God of Peter and of Mary Magdalene ? Where is the Lord who fed thousands with a word ? " Yes, this God is our God for ever and ever. " Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."

Surely it is a great and blessed thing that we are privileged to call the God of all the heirs of Divine grace, from the beginning, our own God. But let me assure you that there is a higher privilege still, of which we are all partakers. In all circumstances we are warranted to exclaim, " Where is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ? " We may look in faith for the same display of love and tender care from the Father with which he regarded his only begotten Son. " The Father himself," says Jesus with great emphasis, " The Father himself

loveth you ;" and still more expressly, in his intercessory prayer, "*Thou hast loved them as thou hast loved ME.*" John xvii. 21—23. O exalted and inconceivably blessed privilege ! "Such honour have all his saints." Be rooted and grounded in this faith, and all spiritual temptations will vanish, all worldly cares will cease, and you will, even in this life, rise as far above the highest attractions of the present evil world, as ye are exalted above its highest dignities.

III. No sooner had Elijah smitten the waters, than the Divine "Amen" comes forth, and the God of Elijah manifests himself. The flood divides. The stream of the river from above is arrested by an invisible barrier, the waves rise and tower on high as before, and the prophet walks, with a firm and sure step, over the dry bed to the other side. Who shall describe the altogether new feelings of Elisha on this occasion ! A deeply humble and contrite soul that, in the midst of its depressed and fainting hopes, has suddenly received an undeniable answer to prayer, or a young minister who, in the midst of his painful doubts of his call to the office, has seen in his first successful casting of the gospel net a Divine ratification of his act, are, perhaps, the persons most likely to sympathize with the prophet's unspeakable joy. He must have experienced something of the feelings of the Israelites in their march through the depths of the Red Sea ; and it might be said of him, "that he was baptized into the river, as they into the sea." Filled with the consciousness of God's presence, all his remaining doubts and scruples must have vanished away, as the mists of morning before the sun. The blessing of his office was now divinely secured to him ; the first-fruits were already reaped, and in this he had a pledge of the full harvest that lay in the far distance to reward the labours of his prophetic life.

Upon his arrival on the other side of Jordan, the sons of the prophets, who had witnessed the miracle from their place of observation, come forth to meet him. There

was a Divine wisdom in calling them forth to make them spectators of the scene, that they might learn from it the Divine commission of Elisha, and reverence in him the successor of Elijah. And well did they understand the Divine token. "They said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha ; and they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him." As if they had said, " There is here another Elijah sent us of God." Not that they forgot the difference of character which distinguished the two prophets, or intended more than what is expressed of the apostle, " There are diversities of gifts ; but the one Spirit." And here I cannot but remark, that those persons mistake the matter grievously who look upon Elisha as a mere copy of Elijah, and his history as a mere echo of that of his illustrious predecessor. There is no such barrenness of idea in the works of God ; no such repetition without difference in the plan of his moral creation. The works of his grace are always original ; always peculiar and individualized forms. Though the stars are the same class and magnitude, though the spirit of a Moses rests on Elijah, of an Elijah upon an Elisha, of a Paul upon a Luther, and of a John upon a Melancthon ; yet these luminaries shine with a lustre all their own, and utter praise not only to the inexhaustible mind, but also to the manifold wisdom of the Godhead. Among all the saints, whose images are treasured up in the Scripture gallery, I know none who is a mere copy and repetition of another ; but can find something marked and distinctive in all.

The reverence which the prophets shewed for Elisha, was paid not so much to the man himself, as the Spirit that rested on him. They thus not only knew the Divine endowment, but they regarded it with veneration and affection. This was a beautiful feature in character ; " for the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit." And so we may regard it in our own case, if our heart beats high in the presence, or at the remembrance, of illustrious men of God ; and we feel ourselves ennobled and

animated in such an exercise. Many of you may know the anecdote which is recorded of one of the greatest painters of modern times. Standing, when a mere boy, before a painting of Raphael, at Rome, he gazed a long while, rapt in silent transport—and at last, as if he had found some great treasure, with joy suddenly beaming on his countenance, suddenly broke out with the words, “I, too, am a painter!” He then left the picture gallery, went home, mixed his colours, and immediately began to produce works not unlike that which had excited his enthusiasm and called forth his hidden powers. In like manner, it may be regarded as a happy sign of ourselves, if the spiritual image of an Abraham, an Elijah, or a Paul, transport us with such an enthusiasm, that we exclaim, “O that my heart was fashioned like theirs.” And if, in such moments, the thought should rise, “I, also, am a child of God,” and we feel within us something of their spirit, it is not at all our duty to reject such a thought. For he who can understand and appreciate such men, and embrace them with peculiar affection for the sake of the Spirit of Christ which is in them, has thereby a tolerably certain mark, that he has at least somewhat of the mind in himself which was in them,—since like can only understand and love its like. Hence the Lord says, “He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet,” that is, in the character of a prophet, or because he is a prophet, “shall receive a prophet’s reward;” for, by this reception, he shews himself to be like-minded with him he receives.

IV. Elisha, with the spirit of his great predecessor, inherits also his office and his flock. Elijah had not commenced his prophetic career under such favourable circumstances. He had entered on a waste moral wilderness; whereas his successor finds a fallow ground already broken up; nay, here and there a blooming plantation, in whose fresh and vigorous shoots there lay a thousand hopes for the future good of Israel.

A minister of the gospel of Christ ought to count it no small advantage, if he find, in the church to which he is introduced, a little flock of believing souls, waiting to receive him. However small their number, he discerns in them, as it were, a centre of crystallization, around which others may be formed, a golden thread on which other pearls may be strung, a living image of what his descriptions of Christian character set forth, and for himself a living focus in which all the rays of his own spiritual life are collected and sent back upon his own soul. The nightingale sings best when there is a constant echo. The merchandise of wisdom, which is better than that of silver, is carried on all the more happily, that the bark of the word which is freighted with it, returns to the preacher laden with the best spiritual experiences of his people.

The ministers of this happy valley can each congratulate themselves that they have enjoyed the same great privilege as Elisha. We found the good seed of the word plentifully scattered among you ; and therein lay your strength, and not in earthly property and endowments. A church that is rich in the word of God is rich indeed. It has then the keys of the invisible world, the weapons against death and hell, the universal remedy for every evil, the wondrous staff that can divide every river, the tree whose leaves are for the healing of the nations, and the lamp that lights the way through time into eternity. And even should this precious treasure lie like unemployed capital, still the church that has the word has much cause for thankfulness. It lies still within the territory of hope, like a field into whose furrows the seed has been cast, and which lies for a while rough and bare. The husbandman regards it with a hopeful eye, for it needs only the gentle showers of spring to clothe it with the fairest and richest promise.

But the churches in our valley are more than such fields. In many places the word has sprung up and multiplied itself in many a mature growth of Christian attainment. The Lord knows it, and therefore he is as a wall of fire round about us ; the Chief Shepherd knows it, and there-



fore he blesses us with a host of zealous evangelists; the holy angels know it, and therefore they guard our dwellings so wakefully and true; Satan with his infernal army knows it, and therefore he regards us with such spite and pours out against us all manner of reproaches and blasphemies. Our brethren too from a distance know it; and therefore when they visit us, they leave us with the feeling of having been refreshed as with living waters. If we look around us in our church meetings, how many a brother and sister's face beams on us there! If we walk through our streets, where is there one in which we could not somewhere or other find the tabernacle of God with men? Yes, there are quarters of the town in which house after house is a tent for the God of Jacob. And oh, how many a lily of our valley blooms in modest retirement, known only to the heavenly guardian, who refreshes it with dew, or perhaps to one or more of us, who have discovered it by accident! How many a sanctified soul walks in the midst of us, unperceived and without talk or boasting; while few know the rich treasures of grace that it carries within, or the ardent love with which it is attached to the Saviour. Yea, were all who fear the Lord among us, to come together into one place, I believe we should be astonished at their numbers, and praise the Lord for his distinguished grace to us as a portion of his church. True, they are of all manner of forms and complexions, but all baptized with one baptism, all inspired with one spirit, all bound up in one bundle of life with Christ Jesus. Blessed inheritance which our never-to-be-forgotten predecessors have left us! We bless their ashes; and offer our sacrifices of thanksgiving to Him to whom all praise is due, over their graves of rest.

But to return to Elisha, whom we left in the way to Jericho. He walks along in the company of the sons of the prophets, in pensive silence. He is bowed down with the weight of blessing, which has been laid upon him, and his heart longs for rest from the mingling and deep emotions which mark this, the greatest day of his life. Elijah's legacy may remind us of that better legacy which Christ has bequeathed

to all his faithful disciples. The mantle which he has left behind is the robe of his righteousness, a festal robe indeed ! “ The skies,” saith the prophet, “ rain down righteousness.” Yes, this garment of salvation is all we can desire. It is armour in the day of battle, a priestly robe for our entrance to the holiest of all, a wedding-garment for admission to the feast above. It is interwoven with the inward holiness of our souls, so that we can appear in the presence of our God, all-glorious without and within.

The God whom we serve is a shepherd “ who carries the lambs in his bosom,” who deems not the angels too high for our ministering servants, and who embraces his own glory and our happiness in one purpose of Eternal Love. The Spirit which he imparts to us may not indeed divide the waters, but quells in us the troubled conscience ; he may not disclose to us the events of the future, but He “ witnesses with our spirits that we are the children of God.” If he does not teach us to call down fire from heaven, he teaches us to cry “ Abba, Father ;” and if he does not make us workers of miracles, he makes us temples of the living God. The office of ministers of the Spirit far surpasses in glory that of the prophets of the Old Testament. Our ministry is that of reconciliation, which calls to those who have been sinners, “ Ye are complete in him !” to transgressors, “ There is now no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus,” and, to bruised reeds, “ The Lord will not break you.” We are not only Christ’s ministers, but we are in Christ’s stead. We are sent by him even as he was sent by the Father. We act in the name of the Son of God, and carry not only the standard, but the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

Beloved, my brethren in the Lord, thus have we been remembered in the blood-besprinkled testament of Him who hung upon the cross ! What a glorious legacy, what an incomparable bequest ! Let us rejoice in this richness of divine grace, and join with triumph in the song of David, “ The lot is fallen to me in pleasant places, yea I have a goodly heritage.” Amen.

## VII.—THE GROWTH IN GRACE.

Much of the future vigour and health of a new-born infant depends upon the hands into which it first comes ; and as its natural malformations may then be most easily corrected by judicious attention, so its natural good proportions may then be most seriously injured by mismanagement. This is true also of new-born babes in the spiritual sense. It is a momentous consideration, therefore, to whose care their souls are first entrusted. How many are weak and sickly all their days in consequence of the errors of their first Christian training ; and how often do we see in the church, as in the world, those who are lame through unskilful rearing !

There is a religious party existing in the midst of us, which, because it does not, and cannot, receive the doctrine of sin and of atonement, in the apostolic sense, has neither part nor lot in the blessed privilege of serving the Lord in bringing in the lost sheep into his fold. No icy heart melts under their teaching ; no resurrection among the dry bones follows their prophesying ; yet in this party there prevails the most ardent zeal to extend and increase itself, which it can only do by dropping, like the cuckoo, its eggs into the nests built by others. The work of awakening and conversion it leaves to others. It does not commence its labours among the dry bones, but only where the movement of life has already spread. It has none of the noble ambition of the apostle, who disdained to build on another man's foundation, Rom. xv. 20. Under its perverting influence many a healthy birth has been sadly crippled, and many a tender and hopeful plant of grace stunted or withered away. I shall take occasion to present you in the following meditations with a description of the true form and natural working of a healthy Christianity.

2 KINGS ii. 16—18.

“ And they said unto him, Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men : let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master .

lest peradventure the Spirit of the Lord hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley. And he said, Ye shall not send. And when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, Send. They sent therefore fifty men; and they sought three days, but found him not. And when they came again to him, (for he tarried at Jericho,) he said unto them, Did I not say unto you, Go not?"

Let us, I. Consider the Historical Fact itself, which is here recorded; and, II. Apply it to the regenerate Soul's growth in Grace.

I. Elisha, carrying the image of the opened heaven in his heart, and breathing the air of that glorious world on the confines of which he had been treading, descended like a messenger from heaven among the sons of the prophets on the other side of Jordan. His face shone with the glory which he had witnessed; his heart was lost in adoration of the wondrous love of God which had been vouchsafed to his master; yet, though he was the herald of a more gracious dispensation, and endowed with a double portion of Elijah's spirit, the sons of the prophets did not at once recognise the full extent of his dignity, however sincere might be their love and respect for him. They could not all at once regard their departed master as replaced by Elisha; much less could they be persuaded, that, in the husbandman of Abel-meholah, a higher Elijah was presented to them by the Lord. It needs no great knowledge of the human heart to account for this. The dazzling powers of Elijah naturally impressed the senses more strongly than the less imposing appearance of the unassuming, brotherly Elisha. The lofty reserve of the Tishbite corresponded more to their natural impressions of greatness, than the condescending familiarity of his humble successor. Elijah appeared rather as a display of the glory to which man may be raised by Divine endowment; whereas Elisha's whole life was an exaltation of the grace of God in human weakness. Hence we need not wonder that the sons of the prophets did not, at once, fully appreciate the substitute whom God had given them for his departed minister.

From exactly the same causes, the disciples of John were slow to perceive that Jesus was greater than the Baptist, who, with his mantle of camel's hair, his leathern girdle, and austere diet, seemed to carry more of the ambassador of heaven in his look than the gentle and affable Friend of publicans and sinners. And besides the magnifying influence of this mere singularity of life, there was something in the doctrine of the Baptist which suited those minds which were not free from legalism, and which welcomed his form of piety as the best suited to their necessities. The Baptist himself would appear to such persons as a sort of perfect man, complete in himself, and entirely abstracted from the fashion of the world; and the good works which he enjoined would bulk before their minds as a definite and tangible sum-total. But Jesus, on the contrary, not only appearing in the greatest simplicity, and adhering to the ordinary forms of life, but describing his kingdom as coming not with observation, and insisting on the secret homage of the heart; promising moreover nothing of human glory to his disciples, and enjoining, as cardinal virtues, poorness of spirit and mourning for sin,—ran most directly counter to the whole bent of a self-righteous and worldly temper, and caused the Baptist all the difficulty he felt in pointing his disciples from himself to that greater than he, whose shoes latchet he “was not worthy to unloose.”

That the hearts of these sons of the prophets were still with their departed master, is evident from the urgent request they make to their new teacher, immediately on reaching Jericho, “Behold,” said they unto him, perhaps not without tears, “there be with thy servants fifty strong men, let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master; lest peradventure the Spirit of the Lord have taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley.” These words have in them something mysterious. What did the excellent men mean? Was it really to seek their master? and if it was, did they not know by divine revelation that he was that day to be taken from their head?

Certainly they knew this ; but they were still in doubt as to the manner of his removal. This lies on the surface of the narrative. We must conceive, therefore, that they thought either that Elijah had been conveyed into some lonely place, in order to be afterwards taken up by God, or that he was already received into heaven, but only in so far as regarded his soul, his lifeless body being still exposed in the wilderness. Perhaps the case of the death of Moses came vividly before their minds, who, in the same region, on mount Pisgah, and within sight of the promised land, was taken up in a mysterious, distinguished, and blessed manner, while his body remained on earth and was secretly buried by the Lord. But whatever were their thoughts, their conduct was evidently marked by that ardent love, which we have all seen by the death-bed of some beloved friend, long doubting the possibility of the fatal separation, and when it becomes at last too plain, still clinging with convulsive grasp to the lifeless clay. And this too is manifest from the words of their excited and incoherent request, that they accounted the loss of their master as irreparable, and with all the high esteem they cherished for his successor, were far from believing that the mighty breach could be filled up by him.

It would have been easy for Elisha, who could hardly be ignorant of what was passing in their minds, to have taught them a different lesson. "I come to you," he might have said, "with a message such as you never heard from the lips of Elijah. I have things to utter of the love of God to man, such as have been before unheard of, such as were revealed to none of the fathers, and such as will fill you with adoring wonder." But Elisha was, as far as possible, removed from any temptation to assert his own dignity. He was vastly above the little sensibilities of those tempers, to which the slightest appearance of disparagement is as the sting of a scorpion. With heartfelt joy he, doubtless, witnessed the love and reverence with which the sons of the prophets adhered to their departed father ; and was not vain enough, for the sake of main-

taining his own place in their esteem, to set aside the advice of wisdom, which taught him to say nothing for the present as to what he had witnessed beyond Jordan, and to wait a more convenient season for his strange and delightful announcement.

What the particular reasons were which induced Elisha to say nothing of the miraculous translation of Elijah, we cannot distinctly explain. There can be no doubt that he was influenced by the best and wisest motives. A prudent steward of the mysteries of God must take into account the wants and capacities of those with whom he deals, and either dispense or reserve his stores according to time and place. And the time and place for his wonderful disclosure, Elisha saw to be not yet come. Hence the increasing urgency of their request, to be allowed to send out the fifty brethren on their mission of search, could not induce him to disclose his secret. They urged him, we are told, "till he was ashamed;" that is to say, till he was embarrassed and knew not what to say. Still he would rather yield to their ill-advised suggestion, and let them take their own course, than discover the mystery before the season. It could at any rate do them no harm to be convinced that neither their master nor his mortal remains were to be found any longer upon earth. This would only prepare them all the better for receiving the account of his ascension in the body; so away they went and commenced the desired search. Three long days are spent in exploring the solitary wilds of the desert. No doubt, in many a silent vale, and bosky forest, their hopes rose high of finding their living master, or at least of coming upon his sacred remains; and who could say in what weeds of death, or guarded by what strange watch! But all is in vain. Disappointment follows hard on disappointment; and on the third day, at even, they return fatigued and depressed to Jericho; and the only reward of their hard journey is the mild but salutary reproof of their master, "Did I not say unto you. Go not."

Sometimes it is found unavoidably necessary to comply

with the wishes of beloved but foolish children, that they may learn a lesson of dear-bought experience. And so it is with those who "are but children in understanding," in regard to spiritual things. They refuse, perhaps, to believe our testimony, that there is a righteousness brought near them, even the righteousness of Christ, which they need only to embrace and be saved, and choose rather to seek justification before God, from some fancied righteousness which is to be wrought out of the tissue of their own good intentions and life-long endeavours. We may repeat, and prove, and urge the doctrine over and over, till at last nothing is left but to say, "Well, be it so. Walk in the light of your fire, and of the sparks that ye have kindled." They may thus torment themselves for a while with the struggle to keep that law which only worketh wrath, and learn, by experience, that the course they have chosen can only end in bankruptcy and ruin. They may thus be led to turn back and appear before us with trembling conscience, to be welcomed with the prophet's question, "Did we not say unto you, Go not." And thus their failure and disaster becomes their greatest fortune. For Christ will then be precious to their souls, and his gospel will prove to them, according to its name, good tidings.

II. It is evident from the narrative before us, that Elisha did not consider the sons of the prophets, as yet, sufficiently prepared for the glorious message he had to deliver. Children of God as they were, and partakers of heavenly grace, they still seemed to the eye of their master, not only to admit of, but strongly to need farther instruction and advancement in the things of God. I shall take occasion from this incident, to say a few words on a subject, in regard to which the great majority of Christians have either inaccurate or defective ideas, and which I have long desired to explain to you somewhat more closely than I have hitherto found an opportunity of doing. This subject is, the "*Growth of the children of God in grace.*"



*and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*" This is the scriptural name for a healthy state of spiritual life; and, in this general light, I shall discuss this all-important topic in its scriptural principles and evidence.

I know no passage of Scripture which presents a finer and juster description of the Christian's spiritual life, than the words of the great apostle. (Phil. iii. 12—14.) "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Yes, my brethren; here is a believer in sound spiritual health. Every one that is in the like state will say with the apostle, *first of all*, "Not as though I had already attained;" *then* he will with the apostle follow after the same end; and, *once more*, he will never forget that this is the end for which he has been apprehended of Christ Jesus. It may be well to pursue a little the consideration of these characteristic marks of genuine Christian life.

Wherever there is life, my friends, sound and natural life, there is progress and development. A plant which puts forth no shoots, and makes no growth, is dead or sickly. Even a tree which has reached the measure of its height and breadth, renews and varies its outward appearance; and as it is in the kingdom of nature, so also is it in the kingdom of grace. Every plant of the Lord's planting must be constantly in a state of change, and ought to be in one of development. "Be ye, therefore, renewed in the spirit of your minds," is the daily call of Scripture, and in some measure it is complied with in all; for they can say, "Though our outward man perish, our inward man is renewed day by day."

"Not as though I had already attained, either were

already perfect." Listen to these words, my brethren : whose are they ? One would think they came from one who was a novice in the spiritual life, one not yet assured of his standing in grace, or even one who had not yet passed through the strait gate. But no, brethren. These are the words of one who had attained a height of perfection, such as, probably, none amongst us has reached. This is the same apostle that could say, " I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me ;" the same spiritual hero who could say, " Who shall separate me from the love of Christ ?" and who, without breach of modesty or truth, could say, " Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk, so as ye have us for an example." And yet this saint, the brightest star in Christ's hand in the early church, here freely and openly confesses that he has not yet attained. No, he adds, " I am not already perfect," and even repeats it with greater emphasis again, " Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended." True, he is not speaking here of what he is in Christ before God. When he speaks of justification, his language is very different. For then he says, " It is God that justifieth ; who is he that condemneth ?" " We have believed on Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ." " By his one offering he hath *perfected* for ever them that are sanctified." He speaks, however, in the place before us, of the inward state of his heart. It is in regard to his sanctification, as judged of by the Holy One, that he makes the humbling confession, " I have not attained."

Be not offended, dear brethren, if I say, that there is some danger among us, if not of resting satisfied with the perfection of our righteousness in Christ, without seeking personal holiness at all ; at least, of resting too soon from that blessed course. How many among us appear to suppose that they " have already attained." Take as an instance, spiritual knowledge. There are many among you who are well acquainted with the great doctrines of salvation, and know the most important proof-texts of Scrip-

ture for them, and have their memories stored, besides, with many precious promises of the Bible, and pious psalms and sayings of godly men. We converse with such persons, and are glad to see them thus furnished. But a year afterwards, we converse with them again, and they remain just as before. Two years elapse ere we come in contact with them once more, and still not the slightest improvement is to be seen. At length the sight of them reminds us rather of a piece of wood-work, carved like a tree, than of a fresh and living production of nature; for there are neither new branches nor foliage to be seen. We find always the same recurring modes of speech—the same views on all points, great and small—the same narrow circle of conception and language; but no extension of the spiritual horizon—no increase of the treasure of evangelical sentiments—no approach to any of the depths of Scripture doctrine. But you say, “What need we know more than we already know?” Ah, there it is! You have finished your course in knowledge, and in this respect, as you suppose you have attained, and are already perfect. But this is an indication of spiritual disease and feebleness. For were your souls in health and prospering, you would say with the apostle, “Not as though I had already attained;” you would feel the imperfection of your knowledge; you would believe that thousands of precious things yet lay hid in the Scriptures; you would search the sacred field with growing interest; you would continually find new glories in the Testament of your Mediator; and when friends conversed with you from time to time, you would always be found exclaiming, “Oh, what precious things I have discovered afresh in my Bible! What a delightful light have I found thrown on this and that subject! what new promises have I met with! and what ravishing views of the glory and excellency of the offices of my Redeemer!” And so we should feel respecting you, as if we had come upon a tree clothed with the fresh green of spring, and we should say, “Yes, this man is growing in grace; how much better does he now understand

the Bible ; how much deeper has he penetrated into the mysteries of the gospel ; how much more enlightened and great are his views on all subjects than they once were !” And so it is, my friends, the more you advance in this wholesome progress, the richer will the Bible become in your eyes, the more strongly will you feel that its treasures may be explored for ages and not exhausted, the more decisively will you say with Paul. “ Not as though I had attained !” and so much the more zealously and hopefully will you prosecute your researches in this repository of the “ manifold wisdom of God.”

But worse still than this delusive idea of perfection in knowledge, is that stagnation of spiritual life which leads men not infrequently to say “ My sins are forgiven me ; on such and such a day I received the assurance of it ; and the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” Henceforth the person leads what is called a Christian life, goes through his daily service of devotions, and “ has attained and is already perfect.” But you ask, “ Is not assurance of salvation a mark of spiritual perfection ? Far from it, my friends. Was not the apostle Paul fully assured of his forgiveness and election ? And yet he says, “ Not as though I had already attained.” Let us never forget that spiritual life of its very nature involves spiritual progress. The child of heaven, the new creature, cannot be always detained in the swaddling-bands of infancy, it endeavours after the stature of a man, “ after the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” The spiritual creature is constantly rising into brighter forms, under the forming influence of that Spirit which brooded in the darkness of irregnecy and called forth the first elements of light and order. The blossom of early love to Christ unfolds itself into the full flower of Christian devotedness. Faith gains its majority and moves with new freedom and enjoyment amidst its glorious inheritance of privileges. Assurance lays a firmer hold on the words of promise ; and the “ fear which hath torment” yields to boldness in entering “ into the holiest of all.” The life of

the soul becomes from day to day a conscious abiding in Christ as its proper element, and a doing all things in his name and by the strength of his spirit. While the dead letter of the law, with all its narrow scruples and perplexities, loses its power to harass, the great spirit of the law is begotten in the conscience and in the heart; and from day to day there rises a new and glad train of evangelical virtues from a region which was formerly the seat of constraint, dread, irresolution, and spiritual lethargy.

We remarked that a genuine Christian in a growing state "follows after, if that he may apprehend that for which also he is apprehended of Christ Jesus." And what is this aim? Hear the apostle himself explain it. "That I may win Christ and be found in him; not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, even the righteousness which is of God by faith." But you say, "How could this be the end of his striving and reaching forth to that which was before? Did he not possess this righteousness at the beginning of his Christian course?" This surprise of yours betrays a want of harmony between you and the apostle. For know, that the righteousness of faith, with the embracing of which a Christian life begins, must continue to the end the object of a constant effort on the part of the believer to realize and enjoy it. In this he must be constantly found; in this he must lose the fears of guilt and the sense of weakness, so that the consciousness of his own sinfulness, as a source of terror and of hindrance in the Divine life, may be more than swallowed up in the conviction that he is "complete in Jesus." And how great are the obstacles to our continuance in this state of faith! Our natural self-righteousness constantly tends to rise up against this dependance on the merits of another, and to bring us once more into the old and beaten track of the *covenant of works*. Our innate legalism of temper seeks to disown all enjoyment of the glorious freeness of Christ's righteousness, till we have reached a certain height of

sanctification. The prejudices of wrong education, and false systems of morals and divinity, greatly increase these difficulties. And even the Christian may now and then find himself in the state of the apostles, "when they could not believe for joy;" and may be tempted by the thought, that to exercise this absolute confidence in Christ is something which savours of presumption, and is destructive of his own personal holiness. O how much is there which must be slain with the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ere we can embrace Christ in the whole of that glorious fulness, in which "he is made of God unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption!" But, as we must all have found that it is in the living and abiding consciousness of what we are and have in Christ Jesus, and in this alone, that we not only have peace and joy, but also strength for warfare, and the means of that victory which overcometh the world; nay, our whole capacity of perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord; so it is our bounden duty to direct our efforts, first of all, to the great work of filling our whole hearts with this blessed conviction of the unspeakable sufficiency of Christ. And hence we must condemn, as an anti-evangelical error, the view of many who seem to think that the aim of a Christian life is altered after the forgiveness of the believer, and that his great object is, thenceforth, the attainment of a so-called righteousness of heart and life. Our eye must still be fixed on the righteousness of the Mediator as our great source of comfort and holy motive. This is not only the shortest way, but the only way in which we can escape from the dominion of sin, and have our hearts fired with a holy and unwearied zeal for the glory of our God and Father in Christ Jesus.

Thus it is that the Christian who, like the apostle, is apprehended, "follows after, if that he may apprehend that for which also he is apprehended of Christ Jesus." And by what way does he pursue this glorious object? Here again the apostle may serve as our instructor, "I forget the things that are behind, and I reach forth to those

that are before." Now these things which were behind, were the whole of his privileges by nature and education, and the whole of his once boasted righteousness of the law. These things he had long since learned to count loss for Christ; he had nailed the image of his former self to the cross; and cast away his specious advantages as dross and offscouring out of his sight. But he still fears the insinuating influence of a legal temper, and carefully keeps guard against its subtle movements. He is not afraid of the view of his misery by nature, for he knows that, where sin abounded, grace hath much more abounded. He dreads rather the dreams and fancies of self-righteousness; and is resolved to have, to all eternity, no other ground of hope than the perfection of the Saviour's righteousness.

And, yet, he is not willing either to abide always amid distressing images of his own sinfulness. He knows that there is a fairer object than these filthy rags—the glorious finished work of the Redeemer. He knows that to keep always in the view of our own guilt and misery, and of nothing else, is the way to enfeeble and dispirit the mind; while it gives strength and elevation to the soul to rejoice in the Lord, and in his salvation. But the apostle forgets more of the things that are behind, than the wants and privileges of his unconverted state. He casts also into the back-ground all the struggles and joys of his Christian life, in order that the view of these might not impair his sole reliance upon Christ. How different is it with many amongst us, who live only in the past, and talk only of its happier scenes, and count the period immediately after their conversion the golden age of their spiritual life; and are thus like old men, who, because they know that the fairest period of their life lies behind them, and nothing remarkable awaits them in the future, can only now and then be warmed into animation, when some lively remembrance of the past darts a sunny ray into their wintry souls. O how unlike the holy apostle! His fairest days are not behind him, but before him. There are sunnier

heights of faith yet to scale—there is a sun of glory which has yet glimmered only through a curtain—an ocean of bliss which has hitherto only disclosed its shallow margin—a light of holiness around the throne, which shines as yet only with faint reflection on the wings of hope.

Such, my friends, was the experience of the great apostle, and it must be yours; otherwise you are weak, and sickly, and void of spiritual strength. May He who is the great Physician graciously regard us, and forgive all our iniquities, and heal all our diseases. May he remove every obstacle to our growth in grace out of the way, redeeming our souls from all bondage of error and infirmity of faith, making us more and more like trees planted, not in the barren waste of legalism, but by the living streams of his gospel, and visiting us with the vital breath of his Spirit, that we may grow up as “trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.”

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## VIII.—THE LETTER OF DOOM.

An awful shipwreck is this day to be witnessed by us. A royal bark of fair promise sinks in the devouring deep, struck by the lightning of an avenging Heaven. On all sides we may see the floating fragments, telling the mournful tale, and bearing the words written on them, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.”

2 CHRONICLES, xxi. 12—15.

“And there came a writing to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus saith the Lord God of David thy father, Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah, but hast walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring, like to the whoredoms of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain thy brethren of thy father's house, which were better than thyself: Behold, with a great plague will the Lord smite thy people, and thy children, and thy wives, and all thy goods: And thou shalt have great sickness by disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of the sickness day by day.”

This awful passage rises before us like a spirit from



another world, pale and motionless, and prophetic of direful evil. Let us contemplate for a little this memorable incident ; and consider, I. The Author of the Letter. II. The Contents of the Letter.

I. Elijah rests from his labours. At the time of his departure the throne of Israel was occupied by king Joram, the son of Ahab, and brother of Ahaziah. The kingdom of Judah was in the hands of Jehoshaphat, whose reign lasted for eight years after the prophet's death. But now he also is gathered to his fathers, and his eldest son Joram, who was of the same name with the king of Israel, and so ill-advised as to marry a daughter of Ahab, has ascended his father's throne. One day this Joram, or Jehoram, received a letter which bore upon it that it came from Elijah the Tishbite. Its singular origin and alarming contents invest this letter with peculiar interest.

When was the mysterious letter written, and in what way did it reach its destination ? This is a question which we cannot very decidedly answer. But we may suppose that it was written by the prophet before his translation, in the foresight of Jehoram's accession and wicked reign, and deposited with the sons of the prophets or Elisha, to be forwarded in due time. This might appear a more powerful means of impression than if the same commission had been given at that time to the successor of Elijah, and might be designed to put honour on the departed prophet after his removal, and to revive and strengthen his reforming influence in the land. If this view appears too little in harmony with the grandeur of Elijah's character, and the supernatural aspect of his whole ministry, it requires no greater effort of faith to believe in the mysterious transmission of a writing from the glorified prophet in heaven than in the descent of a chariot of fire and horses of fire to bear him at first to that blessed place. We cannot set limits to the active powers and exercises of the just made perfect ; and it will probably turn out both that our notions of heaven are, in one sense, too *spiritual*

for its glorious and familiar reality, and in another sense, too *material* for its purity and joy.

II. Jehoram receives the letter, opens it, and reads Unwonted language to a monarch's ear! every word has a sting; every line breathes judgment and doom. Yet what was its effect? The king may have trembled at its threatenings, or turned pale for a moment at the sight of its unearthly signature. But this is all. The ungodliness of his character was too great to yield even to the most tremendous denunciation; and in the armour of pride and unbelief and hardness of heart he bids defiance to every arrow of conviction. The writing was in fact a judicial sentence, contemplating and proceeding upon his past and foreseen impenitence, and announcing the awful judgments by which the long-suffering of God towards him should be succeeded.

This message of death commences with a register of his sins, "Thus saith the Lord God of David thy father, Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa, king of Judah, but hast walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring, like to the whoredoms of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain thy brethren of thy father's house, which were better than thyself." How awful is this impeachment! How gross the series of crimes here denounced! But be not deceived. There awaits you also a like fearful numbering of your sins, and setting of them in order before you, if you are not washed in that blood which alone cleanseth from sin! How awful to have it said to us at the last, "Because I gave you in abundance the word of life, but ye trampled it under foot; because I sent you one messenger of grace after another, but ye wearied them by the hardness of your hearts; because I poured forth my Spirit in your churches, but ye rebelled and vexed him; therefore, ye despisers of the matchless goodness which I bestowed on you, depart from me! Therefore, ye cum-

beers of my vineyard, begone into eternal waste and gloom !”

“ Thus saith the Lord God of David thy father !” How significant these opening words ! As if it had been said, “ Ungrateful man ! how couldst thou forget the goodness which the Lord hath shewed to thy fathers’ house ! Why didst thou not reflect that thy place on the throne was owing entirely to the Divine promise to preserve the seed of David on the throne till the coming of the Messiah ! Why didst thou not learn from David’s example that with the Lord there is forgiveness and plenteous redemption, and so turn from thine evil ways and live !”

“ Because,” continues the writing, “ thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa, king of Judah, but hast walked in the ways of the kings of Israel.” This allusion to his pious father and grandfather is also designed to shew the aggravation of his guilt. Asa, his grandfather, had reigned forty-one years in Jerusalem ; and approved himself a pattern of a good king. “ He had done that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God, even as his father David had done : for he took away the altars of the strange gods, and the high places, and brake down the images, and cut down the groves.” As a true shepherd of his people, he extended his care not less to their spiritual than to their temporal welfare. By his own example and royal ordinance, he taught Judah to “ seek the Lord God, the God of their fathers, and to do the Law and the commandment ;” and the Lord crowned these pious labours with the happiest results. Like a thorough reformer, he did not stop till the last idol in the land was burnt with fire, and the last heathen altar levelled to the ground. He called his subjects back from the groves and the high places to the altars of Jehovah ; and they heard his voice, “ and entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul.” As a vigilant and indefatigable ruler, he neglected nothing which could increase the social happiness of his people, or strengthen

the security of his kingdom ; and as a valiant general, he gained many a triumph over powerful enemies, because he trusted in the Lord God of Israel, and marched to the field with the watchword, " Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many or with them that have no power," 2 Chron. xiv. 11. Towards the end of his life, indeed, he erred in turning away his mind from the power and faithfulness of God, and trusting in the false help of man. He had to repent of it bitterly, yet he slept in God, and the people hallowed his ashes with the tears of gratitude and affection.

A still more admirable king than Asa was Jehoram's father, the excellent Jehoshaphat. His character shines to this day as a living model of princely virtue. He also, like his father, has " obtained a good report" in the unerring record of sacred history. " He walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim, but sought the Lord God of his father, and walked in his commandments." He continued and completed the reformation which his father Asa had begun. The well-being of his people, in the highest and holiest sense of the term, was the great aim which he kept before him day and night. He more than once travelled through the whole land, from Beersheba to the mountains of Ephraim, in order, by his personal influence, to strengthen his people in the faith of their fathers, and reclaim those who had been guilty of apostacy ; and the Lord granted great success to the labours of this royal missionary. He sent also multitudes of priests and levites throughout the country, with the book of God's law in their hands, to instruct the ignorant and to establish the better-informed in the truth. And " the fear of God was upon all the kingdoms bordering upon Judah, when they heard that the Lord fought against the enemies of Israel. So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet ; for his God gave him rest round about ;" and the Philistines and the Arabians brought him presents. And he set judges in the land, throughout all the fenced cities of Judah, to watch over right and justice, and to settle

individual disputes. His instruction to them was, "Take heed what ye do; for ye judge not for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in judgment." If he went to war, his first preparation was fasting and prayer, 2 Chron. xx. 3. His army, distinguished both for discipline and valour, was a million strong; yet he engaged only in defensive war. He gladly remained at peace when his enemies did not molest him; and improved the season of leisure by founding new cities, by promoting trade and commerce, and by attending to the interests of education and religion. Thus did this worthy descendant of David reign. Happy the country which is blessed with such a ruler. Let us all pray that all the higher powers, to whom we are commanded to be subject, "as ordained of God," may be anointed with the spirit of Jehoshaphat.

Such were the honourable ancestors of Jehoram. He had grown up amid the constant light of such distinguished examples. "But a man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven." The children of God are born, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." This hopeful young prince became one of the worst monarchs that ever sat on the throne of David. His whole reign is a tissue of atrocious crimes. It almost seems as if he had formed a regular plan, openly to pour contempt on the example of his excellent predecessors by the disgusting contrast of his own; nay, as if he had proposed it to himself, as the chief aim of his government, to root up and tread under foot, in the shortest possible time, the seed sown by his pious father. No sooner had he buried his father, and taken possession by right of birth of the throne at Jerusalem, than he threw off the mask which circumstances had hitherto forced him to wear, and gave full scope to the malignant and unnatural lusts of his heart. A horrid massacre opens the black catalogue of his crimes, and paves the way for fresh atrocities. His brothers, who were all better than himself, seemed to stand in his way, and as he partly coveted their wealth, but much more feared the reproach which his

heathenish course of life would occasion him in their eyes, and hated them as being a restraint on his own excesses, he formed the deliberate purpose of putting them all to death, and then executed his diabolical plan as rapidly as it was conceived. The innocent brothers, six in number, were massacred without mercy, and many of the great men shared the same fate, as if their blood did not cry loud enough to heaven.

In the hands of his wife, Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, Jehoram was initiated into all the abominations of heathenism, and "did evil in the sight of the Lord continually." Yet the divine long-suffering granted him many a respite and warning to repentance. The Edomites invaded the country, and the city of Libnah revolted to them. But Jehoram persevered in sin, and perverted all his means of grace into occasions of hardening his heart. He openly apostatized from the worship of his fathers, introduced anew the idolatry of Sidon, which had been expelled by Asa and Jehoshaphat, recalled the banished priests of Baal, erected altars, consecrated groves, invited young and old to idolatrous and licentious festivals, and even compelled the people, with despotic intolerance, to take part in these heathen rites. It is to this that the words in the writing of Elijah refer, "Thou hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a-whoring, like to the whoredoms of the house of Ahab." Do not take offence at this plain language. The Word of Truth has no toleration for your hollow and palliating phrases; its appellations strike always at the root of things; and hence it is no wonder that its solemn and searching faithfulness of speech has always been an eyesore to the white-washed pharisee and the showy moralist. Yes! when men depart from the living God, and set up any idol in their heart, be it what it may, though they may call it the enlightenment of the age, philosophy, genius, or liberalism, the Scripture calls it *whoredom*, because it is nothing else; and indeed it is the worst and the vilest. "Thy Maker is thy husband," says the Lord, not only of the

church of Israel, but of the church in every age; and when any member of the visible church forgets this relation, and pays court to the world, from the attractions of its gains, its honours, or its pleasures, the Word of God calls this conduct *adultery*, and pronounces judgment upon it as an object of Divine loathing and abhorrence, and declares the doom of the offender to be cast, as one of the things that offend and work abomination, out of God's holy kingdom. And O, what shall become of those, who have not only committed this crime themselves, but by influence or example, in word or writing, mixed the cup of spiritual fornication for others. Ye faithless parents, who, under the name of refined ideas, have sowed in your children's minds the seeds of ungodliness and apostacy! Ye hollow-hearted teachers of mere virtue in schools and colleges, who train up those children, on whom the name of the Holy Trinity has been named, to self-idolatry and a darker aversion to the true God than the worshippers of Baal! Ye hirelings and spiritual counterfeits in the church, that teach your flocks, instead of honouring the God of Israel, to bow down to the self-made gods of a false philosophy and morality; and ye poets, journalists, and popular writers, that only sound the trumpet to subvert and deceive unwary and unstable souls, and lead them away from the path of truth amid the mazes and pitfalls of sophistry and infidelity! Woe, woe unto you, ye followers of Balaam, ye destroyers of immortal souls! In Jehoram's fate behold your own! A cloud of vengeance, doubly dark, hangs over your heads; and it shall burst and sink you to the lowest hell!

To return to the letter. After it has held up the sins and crimes of Jehoram to his own conscience, it announces the sentence in the name of Him who hath prepared his throne for judgment. What a fearful threatening, "Behold, with a great plague the Lord will smite thee; in thy people, thy children, thy wives, and all thy goods; and thou shalt have great sickness by disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of the sickness from

day to day." Awful manifestation of the just judgment of Him who "clothes himself with zeal as with a garment, and recompenses fury to his adversaries." "Fire goeth before him and burneth up his enemies round about." "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!" Jehoram reads the tremendous sentence; but he makes his face harder than a rock, and his neck is as an iron sinew. Only almighty grace can overcome the monstrous perversity of corrupt nature. Without the working of this grace, the law is but as stubble in the fire; and even that Word of God, which is as a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces, only hardens by its blows the sinner's adamant heart. Jehoram is a striking example of this melancholy truth. Well might he shudder at such a writing; but it did not bend his settled obstinacy. And whatever will not bend *must* break.

The divine curse, like a tempest of fire, soon discharges itself. A hostile force of Philistine Arabians suddenly attacks the border of his kingdom. He sends forth his armies and they are destroyed. The banner of the Lord is no longer in the camp of Israel. With the faith of their fathers, their fathers' strength in war is departed. The enemy pours into the kingdom like a desolating flood, storming city after city, repulsing force after force, and marking all their steps with devastation, rapine, and slaughter. This was the first plague, the punishment of the king in his deluded and apostate people. But it is only the beginning of troubles; for his ears are dull of hearing, and the call of judgment is unobeyed. The enemy presses resistlessly forward. The royal army is everywhere beaten and dispersed. In a few days the heathen invaders are at the gates of Jerusalem. The city is taken, the remnant of the Jewish army is scattered, the palace itself is stormed and plundered, the royal treasure carried off, and the royal family taken prisoners. All his wives, with the exception of Athaliah, who was reserved for a more tragical end, are led away into captivity, and even his sons are banished from their native land. Only one re-



mains behind, Joash, the youngest, for the Lord had respect to his promise, "David shall never want a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel." All the rest are doomed to a miserable bondage. Alarming example of the righteous judgment of God! Behold "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." The destroyer of the people becomes the object of their execration. The avaricious robber is stripped utterly naked by robbers' hands. The denier of Jehovah and his word is denied by Him in return, and given up to his own way. The debauchee and fratricide is visited with the loss of his own wives and children. But the train of his disasters is not yet complete. His intense selfishness might perhaps have taught him to bear these heavy strokes too lightly, and therefore he must suffer in his own person. The horrible disease predicted by the prophet, soon appears and manifests itself to every one as a visible judgment of heaven. For two years it continued without remission, and baffled all the skill of the physicians; "and it came to pass, after the end of two years, that his bowels fell out, by reason of his sickness; and he died. His people made no burning for him, like the burning of his fathers. Howbeit they buried him in the city of David, but not in the sepulchres of the kings."

Thus was the writing of doom accomplished to the very letter; and not a syllable of it remained unfulfilled. Mark this, ye impenitent sinners that are still far from God! A writing like that prophetic one lies also at your door. It begins, "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him!" It continues, "The lamp of the wicked shall be put out, and their feet hasten to destruction." It concludes, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." And its signature is this, "Thus speaks the true and faithful Witness." Well may you tremble, for none of His words fall to the ground. But, blessed be his name, the threatening is not unconditional. It only runs thus, "If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart." There-

fore rejoice in thy respite, O sinner, and thy hope of escape. The manslayer is behind thee, but there is a city of refuge. Lay hold on the hope set before thee in the gospel. Repair to the cross of Jesus, and thou shalt see the handwriting of doom nailed to that cross; and instead of it thou shalt receive another writing into thy bosom, which bears the gracious words, "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee! for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name, and thou art mine."—Amen.

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### IX.—THE MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION.

I know no second example, among all the sons of men, of one to whom such a superabundance of honour and glory has been granted, as to that man on whose eventful history, which stretches very near a thousand years, we have for some time been dwelling with delight. After he had, at the close of an incomparable series of miracles and splendid deeds, passed into heaven without tasting of death, and been fixed by the hand of God himself as a bright and cheering star in the Old Testament sky, for the joy and hope of many generations, new lustre is all at once thrown upon his wonderful character, four hundred years after his departure from earth, by his being introduced as a principal figure into the transporting picture, filled up with inspired lines and colours, of that glorious period, which Abraham rejoiced to see afar off, and which many prophets and kings had desired to witness. Malachi, the prophet of God, thus spoke in Israel, in the name of Jehovah, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse," Mal. iv. 5, 6.

Elijah, recalled, as it were, by this striking prophecy from the ages of the past, now shone as a distant light in the future, and became one of the dearest objects of Is-

rael's expectation. The saints, thenceforth, beheld him in the spiritual horizon as a harbinger of the dayspring from on high, as an inseparable attendant of the glorious Son of David. For four hundred years had Elijah thus shone in the apocalyptic heaven, when at last the Sun of Righteousness arose on our benighted earth, and reflected the light of truth on all the shadows of prophecy. A voice in the wilderness is heard to announce that the kingdom of heaven is at hand; and so the Lord of the kingdom appears; and in reference to this herald of his approach declares, "If ye will receive it; this is Elias which was for to come." Malachi's prophecy was, therefore, now fulfilled; and yet only figuratively, and by way of prelude. That the whole meaning of the prophecy was not yet exhausted, is manifest from our Lord's language, "If ye will receive it!" and still more distinctly from the declaration of John the Baptist himself, "I am not Elias." John was called Elias, merely because he appeared in the spirit and power of Elijah; and there can be no doubt that the words of Malachi point to a personal return of the prophet to earth. This has always been the belief and expectation of the Jews; and thus Jesus the son of Sirach appears to have understood the prophecy, as we gather from his animated apostrophe in the 48th chapter of his apocryphal book. "Thou, Elias, wast taken up in a whirlwind of fire, and a chariot of fiery horses; who wast ordained for reproof in its season, to pacify the wrath of the Lord's judgment before it broke forth into fury, and to turn the hearts of the fathers unto the sons, and to restore the tribes of Jacob. Blessed are they that see thee, and shall be honoured on account of thy friendship; then shall we possess the true life."

And lo! ere we think of it, the ancient prophet himself is before us in a bodily form, after the rest of a thousand years above. He stands on the Mount of Transfiguration, with Moses at his side, and both of them engaged in sacred conference with the Lord of glory. And yet, amazing and unexampled as is the scene, I doubt if even this event

exhausted the full meaning of Malachi's prophecy. He was to come "to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers." Now he has not yet executed this commission; and, consequently, the ancient prophecy leaves us to expect a still farther accomplishment. It is already fulfilled in a typical manner; but its entire fulfilment is what I think we have not yet seen. Are we then still to expect a return of Elias? For my part I cannot avoid this conclusion, and I am inclined to place the event before the conversion and restoration of Israel, when he will probably appear upon the earth in his glorified person, to accomplish a great work both for the Jews, and, through them, for the Gentile world.

How wonderful to find a man who thus keeps upon the stage of the world's history for thousands of years; and passes, though a son of the dust, with equal ease from earth to heaven, and from heaven to earth, to fulfil the great designs of Him whose minister he is! "O, Elijah, how art thou honoured," may we say with the son of Sirach, "which of us is to be praised like unto thee! Blessed are they that see thee, and will be honoured on account of thy friendship." Yet even thou, what art thou but a satellite, shining with borrowed light, and reflecting the grace and love of Christ to sinners of our race!

We are this day to approach the "holy mount." It is a delightful pilgrimage. No mountain has a serener sky or a fairer prospect. May the way be blessed to our souls!

#### MATTHEW xvii. 1, 2.

"And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them; and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light."

The wonderful event here recorded is, beyond all question, a real and not an ideal history. The account of the evangelists, who all concur in this narrative, is enough to shew this. This event is a scene in the life of the incarnate God among men. What wonder, then, that it should

pass beyond all the limits of ordinary experience, and present to us, the children of a day, much that is unprecedented and incomprehensible. Let joy, rather than idle amazement or curiosity, fill our hearts at this glorious spectacle. Lo, here is something more than the fiery sign on Carmel, the burning bush at Horeb, and the flaming glories of Sinai. "This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

Let us approach with reverence this sublime scene; and may the Spirit of the Lord disclose to us the depths of its meaning. We contemplate for the present, I. The probable Design of the Transfiguration. II. The Preparations for the Event. III. The Event itself.

I. In the narrative of the evangelists, the transfiguration of our Lord is connected with a conversation with his disciples, which occurred almost immediately before, at Cesarea Philippi, when the Lord was just about to commence his last journey through the country to Jerusalem. "Whom," said he to his disciples, "do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" They replied, "Some say thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets." Their master answered, "Whom say ye that I am?" Peter, in a moment of fervent inspiration from above, breaks forth with the noble confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus receives the testimony with gracious approbation, and declares, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say unto thee, Thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Never had the apostles stood on such an elevation of faith as at this moment. It was, therefore, a favourable season for introducing them deeper into the mystery of his work of redemption, and disclosing to them more of the awful details of his bloody death than hitherto they had been able to bear. "From that time forth began Jesus to shew

unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day." But the astonished disciples could not understand this discovery. They could not reconcile their minds to the idea of a suffering and atoning Messiah. And Peter, falling back in one moment from his position of exalted faith to the level of a mere natural man, and quite forgetting his place as a disciple, takes his Lord with unbecoming haste aside, and in a tone of advice, or rather of admonition, says to him, "Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee." But the Lord seeing with omniscient eye into the source of this apparently kind entreaty, replies with holy severity, "Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men." At the same time his compassionate heart sympathizes with their difficulties, and provides for their enlightenment that glorious manifestation of himself which was to take place on "the holy mount."

But how, you ask, was this scene of glory to strengthen their faith? The splendour of Tabor was designed to cast a ray of light on the gloom of Golgotha. It was intended to shew the disciples, as they had never seen it before, the inherent greatness of Him, whom they were soon to behold crowned with thorns, and nailed to the cross. The glory of this scene would illustrate the magnitude of his condescension, and the voluntary nature of his sufferings; for they could not but learn from it, that their Master was not to be the victim of unfortunate accident, since such a Being could only die by his own free devotion of himself to death. The miracle was also designed to set forth the harmony of Christ's voluntary death with the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God; a point which was settled for ever by the voice from the "excellent glory." And last of all, this scene of transfiguration would utterly remove the suspicion, that there was something in the establishment of Christ's kingdom at variance

with Moses and the prophets; for the appearance of the heavenly messengers, and their converse with the Saviour, testified most unequivocally to the contrary. Behold, then, what a concentration of Divine light and wisdom in this *one* fact. It contained so much to strengthen the faith of the disciples, that the recollections of their whole life would not be enough to exhaust its fulness.

But let us not suppose that this manifestation was intended for the disciples alone. Not only earth, but heaven also participated in it. It was a spectacle to angels, and the spirits of the just made perfect. With what joy and transport may these bright spirits have hung around the scene, where the glory of their King burst through the veil of his humiliation, and with what new hymns of praise would they celebrate the wonders of his grace!

Nor can we suppose that the transfiguration did not, also, take place on account of the Lord himself. I cannot doubt that it did so; nay, that this was its deepest and ultimate meaning. You know how that, though, even in the day of his flesh, the fulness of the godhead dwelt in him bodily, he, with equal truth and reality, led the life of a man. In this character he had to believe, to maintain a conflict, to learn obedience, even as his own disciples. His way, like our own, lay through the strait and dreary path of manifold temptations, spiritual desertion and darkness; and seasons were not wanting in his life, when, like his people, he really stood in need of strengthening and comfort; and did not despise even the sympathy of his disciples. For the temptation in the wilderness he was prepared by the testimony from Heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased;" and as he was now approaching a more momentous and awful struggle, the glory of the Holy Mount was vouchsafed as a source of heavenly strength. Recollect the scene in John xii. The Lord has come to Jerusalem. The fire is ready for the sacrifice. The night is at hand; the approaching horrors of the hour and the power of darkness gather around his soul. The deep foundations of his

holy nature tremble, and, like a stream long repressed, the cry breaks out "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say! Father, save me from this hour." But his mind fixes itself on the divine purpose of mercy, and the prayer is not uttered ere it is recalled, "But for this cause came I unto this hour." His will is thus entirely one with the Father's will; and his desire takes another form, "Father, glorify thy name!" glorify thyself in me, and shew that thou art my Father, and that "I am thine Only-Begotten. He speaks, and an audible voice from heaven is heard, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again!" Now the words "I have glorified it" look backwards, and have almost certainly a reference to the event of the transfiguration. And as it could only be referred to by the Almighty Father for the same use of gracious encouragement for which it was at first brought to pass, we have here sufficient proof that the glorious scene was primarily intended to strengthen the Son of Man in the hour of trial. Thus the perfectly Holy One was made like unto his brethren in this point also, that in a season of spiritual darkness he was thrown back upon brighter scenes of enjoyment of the Divine communion. For, with the exception of sin, our good Shepherd was willing to go before his sheep in every path of trial and difficulty, and to travel onwards from day to day in entire faith and dependence on his Father. "He wakeneth mine ear to discipline, morning by morning," says he in Isaiah l. "He wakeneth mine ear to hear as a learner. The Lord God has opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back." Who can tell how greatly the faith which enabled the Son of Man, in the last tremendous struggle, to prefix the words of trust, "My God, my God!" to the complaint of desertion, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" was supported by such remembrancers as that of Jordan and the Holy Mount! What a precious thing is a store of gracious experiences! How blessed, amid the gloom and dreariness of the evil day, to "muse on the times of old," and "remember the years of the right hand of the Most High."



II. The contemplation of the event itself and of its other preliminaries will supply us with farther instruction. "After six days," relates the evangelist, "Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart." These three disciples were repeatedly distinguished above the rest; he took them with him afterwards to Gethsemane to see the priestly altar and the sacrificial fire; but here to behold his regal splendour and glory. It seems almost as if the Saviour in this respect also became a man, inasmuch as he was capable, not only of general regard, but of the special affection of friendship, and felt that lovely bond of tenderness which we call *mutual sympathy*, like that of Jacob, of whom it is said, in his affection for Benjamin, "His life is bound up in the lad's life." It is no doubt true that his saints are all equally dear to his electing love; he loves them all even as the Father hath loved him, and he gave his life with equal readiness for all. Yet to his merely human feelings there was a difference on earth, for some stood nearer him than others; and the nearest of these was evidently the apostle John, who, in allusion to this, so tenderly calls himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved," and his brother James, and Peter. How much was there in the natural dispositions of these three to conciliate the special affection of the Saviour! How amiable does Simon Peter appear, even in his errors and failings, with his frank and ardent character, full of zeal for his master, and integrity without suspicion or guile. And who would not have been constrained to love James, the holy and warm-hearted man, with his high and noble decision, which made him ready to be the first of the apostles, as he actually was, to drink the cup of martyrdom. And then John, that noble young vine in the garden of the Lord, that eagle spirit, justly named a son of thunder—but whose voice like the thunder was always heard pealing amid the invisible depths of the sky. John, the most perfectly mirrored image of the Saviour himself, in which were reflected all the love and grace that a sinner could receive

from the Lord of glory—John, whose whole nature seemed purified to the very dross as by a live coal from the altar of the sanctuary—who, next to Him that is “fairer than the sons of men,” can be pointed out as a more pure and engaging character than this disciple! And as we all know that it is not personal excellence, however great, which forms the magic charm of friendship—but a mysterious something which lies far deeper, and which we call harmony, so we find the very heart of this apostle strung in all its chords in unison with the tender and sublime affections of the Redeemer.

Yet our Lord’s special love for these three disciples was but a subordinate reason for their selection on this occasion. He had other reasons, incomparably more important, which are to be found in the characters of these three, and their peculiar relation to his person and kingdom. For they undoubtedly appear as our Lord’s more intimate circle, even as they were selected to be the three principal pillars of the church. It was their privilege first to plant the banner of the Cross upon the mountains of Israel; and therefore they stood in special need of such a preparation as they were now to receive.

We are told that Jesus took these disciples with him to a “high mountain.” From ancient times it had been the good pleasure of God to select the silent tops of mountains, those quiet islands in the ocean of this world’s confusion, as the scenes of the most remarkable and glorious revelations. The mountain on which the transfiguration took place is not definitely pointed out in Scripture. According to an ancient and very credible tradition, it was Mount Tabor, the largest and most beautiful mountain of Galilee. This eminence, which is clothed to the summit with a most splendid profusion of wood and forest scenery, rises in the wide plain of Jezreel, not far from Nazareth and Cana; and a modern traveller has said of it, that, if there be any thing beautiful in nature, it is this green and rounded mountain-pyramid of Palestine. Its summit, which rises boldly into the region of the clouds, is covered with

tall oaks, and is nearly three miles in circumference. It presents one of the most magnificent and charming prospects to be found in the whole world. To the right, the eye passes over Mount Carmel, that ancient witness of Jehovah's glory, and loses itself in the vast expanse of the Mediterranean sea. Northwards, appears the black sharp ridge of Lebanon, and behind it the dazzling snowy cupola of Hermon. Towards the south, the eye first rests on the beautiful verdure of luxuriant vineyards and orange groves, and farther on upon the cheerful hills of Samaria; whilst to the left, gleams the sea of Tiberias, as if its bright expanse were sailing through the waving corn-fields of the plain of Esdraelon. But why should we dwell on these beauties of nature, when it is a scene of history that gives Tabor its interest? why do we cast our looks into the distance, when a more glorious scene near at hand calls for our attention?

The apostles subsequently called the mount of transfiguration "the holy mount." This shews the strong and sacred impression which had there been made upon their minds. Yes, those are in truth holy places, and are for ever sacred in our remembrance, where we have once had cause to say, with Jacob, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved!" There are our Bethels and our Peniels, where he whispered to our souls "I have loved thee with an everlasting love," or wiped away our tears, or crowned our sighs of contrition with a gracious assurance of pardon. These scenes are hallowed ground. They are to us as the house of God, and as the gate of heaven. They are lovely spots in this vale of tears. He who has many of them has true riches.

Jesus commences the journey to the mount, followed by his three disciples. The ascent required about a day; and hence the sun must have set, and the shades of evening begun to fall, by the time they reached the summit. Solemn silence reigns all round. Not a sound breaks the stillness, but the rustle of the evening breeze amid the spreading leaves. The disciples, weary with their journey,

and at the same time deeply affected by their conversation on the way, and their solemn situation with their Lord alone in the silence of night upon a solitary mountain, lay themselves down and sink in slumber. Jesus prays to his Eternal Father. What his prayer was, the history does not inform us. It might be like that in John xii., "Father, glorify thy name;" or in John xvii., "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with the glory which I had with thee before the world was; that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee." What a sublime spectacle! The Lord of glory on his knees before the face of the Almighty! The Son of the living God engaged in holy converse with the Eternal Father on the dark mountain height! Surely if ever the words "come not near" were appropriate, it was here. And what ensues when Immanuel prays? His prayer must rise to heaven as almost the same with the omnipotent will of the Father, for "he doeth always those things that please him." And yet he is ever willing to mingle such intercessions with your prayers, and thereby to support and purify and perfect them! And this is the truth which gives sublime consistency to those glorious words of promise, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you."

III. Jesus prays. And what follows such a prayer? All at once, it seems to the sleepers as if a bright light were playing about their eyelids; and as if the soft sounds of conversation penetrated down into the depths of their slumber. They stir, they awake, they glance round in sudden surprise to see if the night were indeed already past and the sun in the full blaze of noon. But who can describe their amazement as their dazzled eyes fix at length on the glorious miracle! O incomparable spectacle! Behold! Behold! Is that shining One indeed their master! Is the majestic figure, which appears arrayed in the very glories of the Godhead, the same at whose side they ascended the mountain! O splendour that eclipses the sun and moon! radiance of light that might dazzle the eye of seraphim! His countenance, like an opened heaven,

beaming with purity and bliss ! his brow a throne of god-like majesty ! his look as if the earth would sink before it into nothing ! his mouth as if in act to utter the words of creation ! his raiment as if woven of the beams of morning, and worked all over with ethereal sun-light ! The disciples are overcome with the sight. It is not alarm or terror that they feel. No, they are exalted with their Lord, and feel as yet oppressed with the strange joy. This is no Sinai to force the awe-struck confession, " I exceedingly fear and quake." The glory here breathes only too deep a rapture. Their language was not that of the ancient prophet, " Wo is me, for I am undone !" but that of the psalmist, " Cause the light of thy countenance to shine upon us and we are saved."

O that our hearts could be absorbed with this glory of our King ! What health and salvation amid the beams of this Light ! O how beautiful and glorious does he there appear—the fairest of the sons of men—not only the King of Peter and James and John, but *my* King. Hallelujah ! and *thine* ! Yes ! here is more than Solomon in all his glory ! more than Aaron and Melchizedek in their robes of priestly dignity ! When did ever a star shine on our world like this ! When brake ever a sun upon earth's darkness like this Sun ! O incomparable brightness, that lights up the night of the soul, that chases away all the shades of sin and sorrow, that forces the angels to fall down and worship, and makes sinners rejoice with unspeakable joy ! " This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem." O contemplate the King in his beauty ; " Let the children of Zion be very joyful in their King." There he stands—the First and the Last and the Living One—not clothed with the sun, but himself the sun in the kingdom of spirits ; not irradiated from without, but possessing the fountain of light in himself. It is as if the tops of the mountains broke forth into singing, " Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." There he stands on the solitary summit, and not he alone, but his disciples partake of the

splendour of his transfiguration. Here we can, in some measure, anticipate the fulfilment of the words of the apocalypse concerning the city of God, "and the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it ; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." And here also we find a key to that other deep saying, " It doth not yet appear what we shall be ; but we know, that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

" And Jesus was transfigured before them." More literally, " He transfigured himself." The expression implies that the glory was not shed upon him from without, but rayed forth as a light of life that had been in Him from the beginning. Even when he lay in the manger, a poor and helpless infant, and laboured as the carpenter's son, there dwelt in him, though veiled under the form of a servant, all ' the fulness of the godhead bodily.' Single rays of this hidden glory had occasionally broken forth before, in deeds of omnipotence and mercy, so that all who saw him, and even his enemies, were astonished, and said " what manner of man is this ? from whence is he ?" But such an unveiling of the awful sanctuary as this on Tabor, no one had yet witnessed. The curtain was drawn for a moment aside, and revealed the Son of the Highest, " whose goings forth have been from of old from everlasting." But, however glorious beyond all earthly glory, and all description of man, this manifestation was,—it was not the whole fulness of his beauty as the Son of God. In comparison with that glory with which he will meet his saints above, it may be no more than the early glimmer of dawn to the brightness of the perfect day. For he shewed forth his glory only as mortal eye was able to bear it. Then his countenance shone as the sun, but now it is itself the Sun of all worlds ; then his raiment was white as the light of day, but the robe which he now wears is that essential light which enwraps, as a vesture, the Thrice Holy One. Now as the whole scene on Tabor was only a manifestation of the glory which Jesus had in himself,

it was, as the apostle John calls it, "the glory of the only begotten of the Father, *full of truth*." It was nothing external, foreign, or borrowed; but his own individual and real form; it was the very essence of his being; the visible reflection of the indwelling fullness of God, and consequently in the highest sense "full of truth." But for what reason the apostle John calls this a revelation "full of grace," he must himself tell us, if we would comprehend it perfectly. This glory of Tabor must have been a benign glory, a transporting reflection of pure kindness and love. Every glance, every play of look, every word, every majestic act, was radiant with grace, and only grace. Streams of peace flowed into the disciples' hearts; sweet and Sabbath rest was breathed around them, and every ray of his countenance that fell upon them was the transporting smile of a God. No one desired the Lord to veil from them the overpowering glory; no one thought of the prayer of Job, "Thine eyes are upon me and I am not." Their language rather was "Lord, it is good for us to be here!" Here they would gladly have made tabernacles and remained, for ever remained in this beatific irradiation of the only Begotten, full of grace.

We leave the summit of the holy mount, in order soon to return thither in the spirit of devout meditation. Keep firm hold in spirit of the glory that has beamed upon you. What the first sunshine of spring is to the earliest buds of nature, that will this glory be to your faith and to your love. It will break the last fetter of doubt that chains the one, it will melt away the last chilly weight of fear and diffidence that oppresses the other. How blessed the light that is reflected from this great scene on the amazing words of Jesus, "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them." What a ravishing distinctness does it give to that other word of promise, "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." O let us build a tabernacle for our souls amid this glory! Let the summit of the holy mount be our oratory and our watch-tower. Within sight of the transfigured One thy last fear

shall die, and thy prayer shall mount up with holy rapture to the presence of his glory.

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### X.—THE HEAVENLY EMBASSY.

Suppose, my brethren, that a stranger from another world were to descend to our earth, with senses so constituted that he could in one moment take in all the countries of Christendom, and at the same time perceive all the transactions of which they were the scene. Suppose that the time was the morning of Christmas day, and that he took his stand on a mountain so high as to command a view of all the kingdoms of the world “in a moment of time.” Then let the sound of innumerable church-bells be borne to his ears, and the sight of endless crowds of festive worshippers be presented to his eyes, and let him hear at the same time the sound of rejoicing choruses in every sanctuary, and every prayer and sermon sending forth its notes of jubilee! How great would be the stranger’s excitement! How eager his desire to learn the origin of such a festival of the world! But were he gifted with the power of looking backward into time, as well as around him into space, and were he guided by some equally gifted spirit, not to an ancient field of battle, not to the capital of some great empire and the palace of illustrious kings, but to a poor village in an obscure land, to a lowly stable, with a mean travel-worn woman in it, and a new-born infant lying in scanty swaddling-clothes amid the straw of a manger; and were we told that it was the birth of this neglected child that had excited the universal jubilee, how would his wonder rise and transcend all expression!

He might fancy it at first all a dream, and wonder what sort of world this was in which so unheard-of a revolution could come to pass. And when he was instructed farther, and told that the history of many a great genius, many a mighty conqueror, and founder of a new religion and



school of wisdom, had begun in circumstances of great obscurity, his surprise would not even then be done away ; for he would hear this Child spoken of in a higher strain, and announced by a heavenly chorus as neither man nor seraph, but the Eternal Son of the Eternal God, “ manifest in flesh.”

It is good, my friends, to bring the fresh and uncorrupted feelings of other orders of being to rectify and exalt our own. For how low are our notions, how cold our faith in “ this great mystery of godliness.” O it is no light and trivial thing to believe in an Incarnate God, but an awful and serious matter. This Faith is a miracle—like the birth of the Son of God himself. Is this Child that I can take in my arms and caress, as it prattles and smiles on me as other children do, in very truth one in person with the Eternal Word, the Creator of all ? O my poor brain ! how shall I find room in thee for such a thought ? It is an unfathomable mystery ! If I never felt before what it is to sink beneath a thought, I feel it here. But can we stay for ever by the manger ? No, we must go forth from this scene of awful eclipse, from the stable, the manger, and the days of infancy, and re-assure our faith amid those glorious outbursts of divinity which marked the holy manhood of our Saviour. And when I have seen all, and followed him to his last ascent of triumph, my heart then casts off its load and breathes a freer air. I carry back the reflected lustre of his almighty deeds to the dark and lowly scene. I return with a heart whose craving void this Incarnate God alone can fill ; and when I re-enter the stable of Bethlehem, I join with fervent soul in the angel’s song, I kneel before the manger in the dust, I stretch my hand to heaven, and in defiance of Satan, who would gladly seal my lips from a confession which bodes him fall and overthrow—in defiance of the might of all his host, whose fierce mandate of “ silence ” I burst, with the gates of hell, asunder,—in defiance of the spirit of an apostate age, that cannot longer restrain my tongue with its scoffs and laughter—and in defiance of my

own pride of reason which sets itself against a testimony that casts it down into the dust,—I bend before the infant in the manger, and I swear to God “Yea and Amen,” this child is the True God and Eternal Life,—a feeble creature, and yet the Lord and Maker of all creatures!

One of the many places where this confession is as easy for the faith of the Christian, as at Bethlehem it is difficult to make, is the summit of Mount Tabor. From this holy mount a light is reflected at once on the manger and on the cross, which chases all doubt away. We return now to this sacred spot, to refresh our souls amid its marvellous light with new joy and peace in believing.

MATTHEW xvii. 3—6.

“And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid.”

Here then we stand once more on the sacred summit—a solemn stillness, as of a sanctuary, around us—before us, the King in his beauty. Again we would gladly lose ourselves in the contemplation of his single glory; but, behold our attention is divided. The sacred circle of objects is increased, and our eyes are attracted by the new appearance. There are three objects which at present claim our attention: I. The Heavenly Embassy. II. Their Converse with the Saviour; and, III. Simon Peter's Request.

I. The disciples stand in adoring wonder, and in rapt contemplation of their glorified Master. All at once a new amazement fills them; for, behold! two glorious forms, one on each side of the Lord Jesus, shining in the same light and bending with reverence before him. “Who are these, and whence come they? Did we not ascend the mountain with him alone? No! these are not mortals whom we behold, the crown of life is already on their

heads." And lo, the Saviour begins to converse with these venerable strangers. The disciples listen, and, hark ! what names do they hear their Master use ? Moses and Elijah ! Do they hear aright ! And has the earth then fled away ; and is Time gone ; and has Eternity, that sweeps away all distinctions of ages, and brings all duration into one awful point, already dawned upon them ! They cannot be mistaken ; the glorious personages are indeed two citizens of the invisible world, two happy saints from the Jerusalem above. A sure and sacred instinct would have taught the disciples to recognise them without more instruction ; for their image lived in the hearts of the chosen people, clear as ever form did in the mind of an artist. The one is now fifteen hundred years old, and yet fair and flourishing, as a green palm tree, in eternal youth. How could the disciples mistake his majestic expression ! In these glorified hands lay once the mighty rod that divided the waves of the Red sea. Under these feet did Sinai quake, when the Lord came from Paran with a fiery law. These arms, upheld in prayer, laid Amalek in the dust ; and these eyes saw manna rained from heaven, and water burst from the flinty rock, and have seen that glory of the Lord which on earth could not be shown. It is indeed Moses that stands before us ! the captain of Israel—the king in Jeshurun—the man who “ esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.” And the other—how can he be a stranger to us ; there is the same undaunted eye, the same lofty majesty of look, that we knew so well in all our pilgrimage with him. Elijah ! yes ! the heroic Tishbite ! It is almost a thousand years since he shook off the dust of earth in the wilderness of Jericho, and mounted in his fiery chariot to the world of rest. A thousand years has his voice mingled in the choirs above, and now he stands suddenly before us, in the same body that saw no death, on the old scene of conflict ; but, O, with what new feelings would he look round on all, as the dim outline rose before him, under the silent stars ! here, the summit

of Carmel ; there, Jezreel and its wide plain ; beyond, the dark thickets and rocks of Cherith ; and far to the south, the lonely waste, with the juniper tree, and the awful height of Horeb. With what dim and all but invisible hues of sadness would his moments of doubt and care and despondency now appear ! and all his sorrows vanish from his sight, like the dreams of a night that had long since fled !

Moses and Elias ! Welcome visitants in this vale of tears ! Had they been allowed to break their silence, what wonders could they have told us of ! For long centuries they had been in the immediate presence of God, for long centuries the Sabbatic rest of the world above had been the element of their life. Their feet had trod the ever-verdant hills of paradise, their hands struck the harps of æraphim, and their eyes ranged through familiar splendours, of which a faint reflection dazzles ours ; their hearts drunk in a tide of rapture, of which scanty drops make up earth's happiness. What could they not have told us of death and the resurrection, of the scenes and the life of paradise ? But they are silent ; and the reason is, that, like him who was caught up into the " third heaven," they had seen and heard things not " possible to utter."

You know the striking description which Paul gives of this great experience of his own, 2 Cor. xii. 2, &c. The strangely broken language of the apostle shews how deeply his heart was moved by the recollection of this " vision of the Lord." He is struggling to express something which he counts among the highest and holiest experiences of his life. He cannot find words to describe the act of translation, and he knows not whether he was in the body or out of the body. One thing he knows, it was no dream or play of the fancy, but a real translation into Paradise. Where was he then, for he was away from the earth ? Was it in some blissful planet or star, from whence, like Moses from the top of Nebo, he could " behold the land that was very far off." No ! it was a higher flight. He had been in the very heart of that land, " in the third heaven," above the noise of earth, above suns and firmaments, in the realms

without sun, or moon, or stars of light, amid the blaze of the Eternal throne, whence no hallelujah is echoed back, in the bride-chamber of the New Jerusalem, in the palace of the King of kings. And what word does he bring from that great capital of the universe, whence no traveller returns, no vessel steers to this island speck of ours? Ah, our eager curiosity is vain, our fond anticipations vain! For glowing description, we have the cold assurance that all description is impossible. Cold assurance! I recall the word. For is not this silence more eloquent than speech? Is not this confession of the poverty of language, and the weakness of our faculties, and the inadequacy of all the inlets and organs of sense and time, full of a depth of joy and a promise of immortality, greater far than if eye had seen it, or ear heard it, or it had entered into the heart of man to conceive it? The apostle will rather leave the picture to shine uncopied in his own chambers of imagery; for what were the brightest of earthly colours but gloomy shades? the radiance of sun and stars, and the bloom of roses and lilies, but the broken and misty rays of twilight? One thing may teach us some imperfect notion of this surpassing glory,—the lesson of the apostle's life. The revelation had been vouchsafed him fourteen years before, and though locked in his own breast, it had made him feel as if henceforth his connexion with the world was at an end. His conversation is in heaven, and on earth he is no more at home. In that upper world all his hopes, his desires, his thoughts dwell; and the morning and evening song of his heart is, "I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ." Death seems to him the happiest of messengers; yea the death of martyrdom, for he knows whither the way leads from the dungeon and the cross. O, how gladly will he now drink the cup of wormwood to the dregs, when he knows what waters of life are to fill the cup of immortality! how readily will he walk into any path of torture and fiery trial, since he knows that it will end at the gate of the celestial city! "I reckon," he exultingly exclaims, "that the sufferings of this present time

are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." "I count not my life dear to me, so that I may finish my course with joy."

Not less glorious, though equally indirect, is the news which the visitants on Tabor bring us of the heavenly world. They are *themselves* a living epistle of the things of the world to come. Their very appearance speaks cheering words of comfort to the faith that still trembles weak and uncertain over the tomb. What a joyful evidence have we here of the conscious, undivided, personal, and recognised identity of the spirits of the just in a future state of being! And then the glory which shines around them, the light of immortality which encircles those heads on which burst so many a storm of trouble, the sunny radiance of peace spread over faces that were once dark with toil and suffering, the deep settled joy that plays over features once moist with the chill of death! what a blessed testimony is all this to us of the resurrection and the life, and of complete victory over death, through our Lord Jesus Christ! We have indeed a greater witness still than Moses or Elias. But thanks be to God that in our hours of doubt and gloomy fear of death we can look not only to the empty tomb of Joseph but to the heights of Tabor, and in answer to the question of the Tempter, "How are the dead raised up?" can point not only to the person of our risen Lord, but also to the real and glorious forms of those who on earth "were men of like passions with ourselves."

Since the gate of Paradise was closed, Heaven had hardly ever visited earth in such a manner as here on the mount of Transfiguration. What an assembly! Here the Son of Eternal Love clothed in majesty! Before him the two high ambassadors from the city of God; beside them the pillars of the New Testament Church; in the clouds, doubtless, the hosts of angels; and in the midst, though unseen, the Eternal Father. When had there ever been such a congress as this? What are the most splendid of

earth's conferences to this august interview? How great the transport of all, and not least of the heavenly visitants! Hitherto it had not been granted them to salute the King of kings as a kinsman and a brother. But now they saw Him, the Wonderful, whose day they had desired so intensely to behold; the Bright and Morning Star, for whose rising they had so long kept watch. "And art thou He through whose bloody death we have already for a thousand years worn the crown? Thou the Lamb of God that didst take away our sins ere thine offering was complete? This the body whose most precious blood hath cleansed our souls ere yet it flowed; and these the hands that have opened for us the door of mercy on the faith of a ransom they should hereafter pay?" Such was the language of their hearts; and gladly would they have fallen in the dust before Him, who was their resurrection and life, their way to the Father and to heaven, and the Author of that glorious righteousness in which they stood acquitted before the Most High, and assured of his eternal love and favour. O look once more on this blessed circle on the holy mount, and behold them bound together in a deep and sacred union! The Father one with the Son, as in essence, so also in the plan of the world's redemption! The Son one with the ambassadors from on high, who act as his servants and prepare for him the way! Moses and Elijah one with John and Peter and James, as bearers of the same sovereign banner, as pillars in the same temple of God! The apostles one with the angels, as ministering to the same spirits who should be heirs of salvation. Exalted bond of union! Glorious alliance of all that is good in the universe directed to one end and aim, that "the name of God should be hallowed, his kingdom come, and his will be done on earth as it is done in heaven!"

II. Moses and Elias in glory before the Son of Man! the receiver of the tables of stone, and the reforming leader of the holy prophets! How important this strange meeting! It is a historical demonstration of the perfect

harmony and unity of the Old Testament economy of salvation and that of the New. Moses appears as the representative of the law; Elias as that of prophecy. As such they humbly and adoringly drew near to Jesus. The Law and the Prophets do homage to the Son of Mary; and this is the grand lesson which we ought to learn from this scene. The one meant nothing by its institutions, and the other knew nothing by its predictions but this Jesus of Nazareth. "Thou art He," exclaims the Law, "to whom I as a schoolmaster would bring every man." "Thou art He," answers Prophecy, "who wast the subject of my inspired song." And when Moses and Elias disappear in the radiance of Him "who is fairer than the sons of men," the great truth stands embodied before us, that "Christ is the end of the law and of prophecy." Prophecy finds in him its fulfilment, for he is the substance of all its shadows. The law ceases from its judgments and threats and condemnation, as soon as it finds us in Christ, who has satisfied its utmost claims.

Moses and Elias converse with the Lord. He that hath ears to hear let him hear! What kind of discourse is it which they carry on with him? Do they announce that a chariot of fire stands ready to bear him away from the dark scene of earthly conflict to the bliss of his Father's house? O, how justly might he have left a world that knew him not! but then where were we to all eternity? and even Moses and Elias must have cast away their crowns of glory, and given themselves to be bound anew in the chains of death and of hell. Far different is the subject of discourse. It is of a cross and a crown of thorns; of an altar and its sacrificial fire. "They spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem," Luke ix. 31. As messengers of the Eternal Father, they audibly affirmed that it was the Father's will that with his own precious blood he should make atonement for sin; "for without shedding of blood was no remission." They impressed, in God's name, a new seal upon the ancient and eternal truth, that nothing but his atoning death could break



down the wall of partition between earth and heaven, and that he, as the good Shepherd, must "lay down his life for the sheep." Such was the substance of this exalted conversation. Perhaps these holy messengers, for the first time after a thousand years, trembled with awe as they spoke of such things to the Son of God. But they call his sufferings and death a decease, or *exit*, as if they meant to comfort him by the expression; and they speak of the *accomplishment* of this decease, or *exit*, as if they would open a view from the cross to the crown and reign of glory. And the Son of God with cheerful resignation hears the counsel of Eternity once more declared, and gladly repeats his vow of entire submission to the Covenant, "Lo, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart."

III. The sublime interview between our Lord and the heavenly embassy is brought to a close. The glorified messengers are about to take their departure. But the disciples wished to have it otherwise, and would gladly have prolonged the blessed season. In their name, Peter, forgetting all but the rapture of the moment, earnestly exclaimed, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias."

Peter has been severely censured by many writers and commentators for this exclamation, as yielding to selfish enjoyment, and forgetting the progress of his Master's kingdom. But these charges appear to have no better foundation than the suspicion of the aged Eli, which was excited by the pious fervour of Hannah. We regard them as quite groundless, for his request must have proceeded from the purest motives, and was not the dictate of the flesh but of the spirit. Was it not really good to be there? Did not the most spiritual and exalted joy flow there from the sight of the King in his beauty? The unveiled face of Immanuel was there; in beholding which even the inhabitants of heaven find their supreme delight. Never had

their Lord's condescension to the guilty shone in so overpowering a light. Never had such deep views of the glory of the Son, and the grace of the Father that sent him, been vouchsafed them before; and can we wonder that their souls, satisfied with the likeness of the Godhead, forgot all else in heaven and on earth? Surely it was not a subject of blame, but of praise; not a spiritual defect, but a high spiritual attainment, that they found in the enjoyment of this close communion with God the end of all their desires and wishes, and could say, with the devout Asaph, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon all the earth that I desire besides thee!"

There is a certain overvaluing of religious frames and feelings, against which it is right for a faithful minister to warn his hearers. If they build their confidence, not upon the Rock, Christ, but upon the treacherous and shifting ground of their own rapturous experiences of communion with Christ, then we must tell them that their foundation rests upon the sand; and so far from condoling with them when the blasts of trial and temptation sweep their joys and transports away, we shall rejoice if such a lesson teaches them to seek a firmer basis in the work of Christ out of themselves, and to draw all their spiritual happiness and security before God from that source alone. There is, however, a rejoicing in the Lord which has no such danger, and which it is at once a duty and a privilege to cherish always. It springs from the believing contemplation and appropriation of the Saviour's perfect work as Mediator. The dignity of his person, the sufficiency of his atonement, the glory of his righteousness, the freeness of his gospel, the grace of his Spirit, the blessedness of eternal life with him, when seen by the eye of faith, and laid hold of by the hand of faith, may well produce a joy to which all other joy is as nothing, and which is the very strength of the renewed soul for conflict, the very breath of the life of heaven. O blessed life, in such a vision of the great High-priest! The dust of earth is shaken off; the soul is changed by it from glory to glory, and the righteousness of

justification and sanctification are blended into one. Sin is as it were "cast out as the mire in the streets." The soul is raised above all the thoughts and desires of nature to an unworldly and godlike strain. The heart is all zeal for the glory of its Lord. Time and sense have lost their charms; and all the arrows of temptation are counted as straw and stubble. The baits of lust are now regarded with a recoiling horror; the lighter fascinations of pleasure put away from us with a pitying smile. Are we by nature proud? we now lie low at the feet of Jesus; are we cold and selfish? we could now embrace the world in the arms of a true and active charity. A mighty sun has drawn us up into its sphere, and keeps us there; and now the gladness of light is in our souls, and all the virtues, like seasons, follow their glorious round.

"Lord, it is good to be here." For tell me, Where is heaven? Is it behind the curtained clouds? beyond the stars? Is it where the seraph strikes his golden harp? where the ever green palms wave? No, brethren, it is where the Beloved Son abides; where he reveals himself to the happy soul. This Tabor was at best but a deserted height, a gloomy mountain summit. But so soon as the King of Glory revealed himself upon it, there was no happier spot in paradise than this lonely eminence. Its aged firs now waved as the palms of immortality; the sighing of the night breeze was as the breath of Sabattic rest; the stony ground was fair as a pavement of sapphire; and, amid the dusky glades, there was spread a peaceful Eden, into which the angels of God might have descended as of old. How needless the question *where* and *what* heaven is, at least in the minute and anxious way in which many pursue it! Christ is my heavenly kingdom; his presence my highest name for joy. "Lord, it is good to be here!" This is the song of the bird that hath found a house, of the swallow that hath found a nest! O how cheerful are the words: "It is good to be here!" Under the Old Testament it was, "How dreadful is this place." Now all is more tender, more peaceful, more confiding. It expresses

calm longing, hallowed delight. With this cry the New Testament dove drops her weary wing, and alights on the olive-tree of gospel peace. With this song the true church floats swan-like on the calm and mirrored depths of the sea of grace, and gently breasts its shining waves. Why should this language of faith be so rare among us? Few of us know our true element; fewer still seek to live in it. Nevertheless it abideth true, that there is even here a rest for the people of God; and that he that has found it has ceased from his own works as God did from his. Happy the man that has found this rest. He unbuckles and throws aside the armour of sinful care, he sits down under his vine and fig-tree, where none dare make him afraid, and writes over the tent of his pilgrimage, "Lord, it is good to be here."

"Lord, if thou wilt," continues Peter (and his language shows how much the glory of his master had repressed his usual forwardness), "let us make here three tabernacles." But for whom? "one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias." He would then have had these citizens of heaven give up the hope of return to paradise. This was a hard thing to ask. And yet he was right in taking it for granted that Moses and Elias would gladly have staid at the desire of Jesus, wherever he was. And it was a still fairer feature of character, that he desired to build not four or six tabernacles, but only three; as much as to say, "We are willing to stand at a distance and listen." The question, "Who should sit on his right hand and who on his left in his kingdom," had no place here. When we have a clear sight of the glory of Christ, our own pride is laid in the dust. Or perhaps they thought of sharing with Jesus the tabernacle which he should occupy, as they could venture there so much more readily than into the others. And if it were so, how deeply true is this to the feelings of all the children of God. A faithful man of God, well known to you all, said, in his last moments, that the thought of having to pass, as he entered heaven, through all the bright ranks of angels and glorified spirits, almost made

him afraid ; but upon recollecting that he should come at once to his Saviour, his heart was again at ease, and he could depart with joy.

You are aware that no tabernacles were actually built on the holy mount. The shades of night soon closed over the scene, and left the disciples nothing but the remembrance of its exceeding glory. The corn of wheat was first to die, ere it could bring forth fruit. They were to tell the vision to no man till the Son of Man were risen from the dead. The tabernacle, for whose delightful shade Peter thus longed, could only be erected above the cross. Now, however, this holy tabernacle is erected in this vale of tears. It is a temple, wondrous, glorious, and without parallel. Its pillars embrace a world. Its roof rises above the stars. Its walls are impregnable as Omnipotence. Heaven and earth may be shaken ; but its foundations stand and cannot be moved. The natural eye sees it not. The glorious building is visible only to the eye of Faith. This temple is the Holy Catholic Church of Christ, in which no man believes but he who is within its portal. The light falls into this temple from above. Here we no longer grope in the dark, but walk in the light of the seven-branched candlestick, and "know the truth." The deepest questions have been answered in this heavenly oracle. Here it is asked no more, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord?" For all know of a sacrifice that hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Here is no longer room for the lamentation of Cain, "Mine iniquity is greater than it may be forgiven." For here it is said, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Here is no longer ground for the entreaty, "Let not God speak with us, lest we die." For all have learned exultingly to cry, "Abba, Father!" and to cast themselves into the arms of the Eternal, as dear children. The robe which every one here wears is a robe of righteousness. The bread which is here broken to all, is a peace of God that passeth all understanding. The wine, of which all are partakers, is a joy which the world cannot give or take away. The air

which is breathed here, is the air of paradise. The incense of prayer which is here kindled, rises through the clouds, a smell of a sweet savour to the Lord. The songs which resound here, have all one burthen, "I obtained mercy;" and the commission of all who minister is, "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people."

"If the lines are fallen in pleasant places" to any one under the sun, it is to him who dwells in this spiritual tabernacle. O happy brother, whoever thou art, and how poor soever thy earthly dwelling, thou needest not envy monarchs on their thrones, or the renowned of the earth, as they pass under arches of triumph to halls of honour! Verily, thy abode is glorious, resting as thou dost, under the shadow of the Almighty, and adorned, as thou art, with the fulness of his royal treasures. Thou sleepest behind walls where no arrow of the King of Terrors can harm thee, and no lightning of vengeance smite thee more. Though poor thy chamber, the sunshine of Eternal love disdains not to enter it; and soon after a little more of earth's darkness and storm, thou shalt exchange it for a mansion on high, amid the rest that "remaineth for the people of God."

Who is it that opens for us this tabernacle of peace? He only who bears the key of David. He only, on whom, as on an eternal rock, this "house of the living God" is founded. Still he stands at the gate and is ready to open it to all. O, fall at his feet, and supplicate to enter in! Yea, rise not up till he has opened to thee the door of his kingdom, and thou canst rejoice in him, as, "He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and that shutteth, and no man openeth." Amen.

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## XI.—THE SHECHINAH.

"I am desolate," complains the royal Psalmist. Psal. xxv. 16. Here he spoke truth; but not the whole truth. He was right as to feeling; but feelings may deceive us. The Lord was still with him, behind the veil.

"I am desolate," is a complaint that is more frequently heard in the tabernacles of the righteous than any other. But it ought not to be hastily uttered. For consider, that this is to accuse the faithfulness of Him, who hath said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee;" and again, "Lo, I am with you always, to the end of the world." These are the words of the Alpha and Omega, the faithful and the true Witness, who will abide with us for ever.

Many exclaim, in reference to God's dealings with them in Providence, "I am desolate." Well, if it were so, and that the Lord led thee by a way in which thou wert quite alone, would that be a misfortune? If he does but lead us, our way is safe and right. Shall the clay say unto the potter, "What doest thou?" And yet I believe that, even in this sense, no one can say with truth, "I am desolate or alone." O, there are many that travel the same road; only we do not know of it. Look into the Scriptures. There, at least, you will undoubtedly find some one whose experience is a faithful mirror of your own. And how comfortable is this companionship of trial of some one of the saints of God; for the idea that we are quite alone overcasts our joy and weakens our faith.

"I am alone," thinks many a one, in looking at his faith. "I believe things which millions reject as foolishness, a Trinity in Unity, an Incarnation of the Godhead, a true atonement for sin." And then the doubt immediately suggests itself, "Am I in the right, and so many others in the wrong?" Yes; be assured you are of the truth, and all the rest blinded by error. But are you alone? No, you are not alone. Read the pages of history, and what do you there behold? Assemblies of the saints converted into scenes of massacre; pulpits stained with blood; martyrs proclaiming on the scaffold, "God was manifest in the flesh;" and crying out at the stake, "None but Christ;" and, in gloomy dungeons, the prisoners of the gospel singing to Him that lay in the manger, while tyrants and bloody priests, and arch-heretics, and ministers of torture, and all the hell-hounds of persecution, have had to con-

fess that the Word of the Incarnate God was also the power of God to all that believed it, and a breastplate of defence which the shafts of death could not pierce. Is this true, and art thou still alone in thy faith? And rest assured of this, besides, that the number of those who have enlisted under the same banner with thee in the present day, is not so small as thy desponding heart would often make it. And even were it so, is the generation of mortals that now surround thee, the world? Lift up thine eyes on high! Behold "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, standing before the throne of God and of the Lamb." Listen to the hallelujahs of the "great multitude, which no man can number." Lo, these are the companions of thy faith, thy brethren in heart, who stand on thy side and join in thy song of triumph, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain!"

But though all these songs above were hushed, and thou stoodest with thy faith alone in the world, what then? The word which thou holdest fast is confirmed, attested, sealed, as nothing else is. All that is most glorious and fair in the history of man,—thou findest it where this word has sounded and found entrance. Thou seest but one golden thread running through the dark history of our race; and mark! it follows closely the track of this word. There only where the message in which thou hast trusted has found open hearts, dost thou find the growth of virtues, which are no specious show, but shine all the fairer the more strictly they are brought to the test. There only is the reign of love—there only the abode of peace. There only does the streaming eye look upward from the depths of affliction; there only is the sigh of unworldly longing heard, that knows no fear of death, "I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ."

And even should this seal, too, be hid from thy sight, the word of faith, the gospel of thy salvation, would lose nothing of its infallible certainty. Thou hast greater witness far than this. The present lecture will bring this deepest ground of evidence fully into view.



## MATTHEW xvii. 5.

“While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them ; and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased ; hear ye him.”

A new wonder is presented to us on the Holy Mount ; the most sublime part of the transfiguration scene. Let us collect our thoughts, in order, calmly and devoutly, to consider, I. The Bright Cloud. II. The Voice out of the Cloud.

I. “While Peter yet spake, behold a bright cloud overshadowed them.” This bright cloud had an important and sublime meaning. It is the Shechinah ; the dwelling-place of the Ancient of days ; the covering of Him “who walketh upon the wings of the wind, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.” The common sign of Jehovah’s presence, in the days of the Old Testament, was a cloud. In the time of Moses, a cloud, rising like a pillar towards heaven, formed the habitation in which he marched before his people of Israel through the wilderness. In a cloud he clothed the manifestation of his glory on Sinai. In the symbol of a cloud he rested over the mercy-seat in the tabernacle, and there received the blood of atonement, and dispensed his sacred oracles. At the dedication of Solomon’s temple, “a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud ; for the glory of the Lord had filled the house. Then said Solomon, The Lord hath said that he would dwell in the thick darkness.” Now, what did all this indicate but the awful majesty of Jehovah, and his distance from sinful men ? What was it but a warning, “Stand afar off ; for no one can look on my face and live.” But a cloud different from that of the law is here. It is attended by no storm and tempest ; it comes not as a chariot of war, with rolling thunder and flames of fire. It sinks still and noiseless, as if borne on gentle winds upon the summit of the mountain. It is not dark or lurid ; but radiant, as if the

sun shone behind it; and bordered with light, as of the dayspring from on high. It announces the dawn of a new economy; and hangs like another rainbow of promise, a sign of a better covenant. And yet it shines with a borrowed light, which radiates like every symbol of mercy from the mount of Calvary.

Moses and Elias enter with Jesus into the cloud, calm and joyful as into a presence chamber, or as into a Father's house. How far from the ancient leader of Israel is now the language, "I exceedingly fear and quake," with which he once drew near to the thick darkness in which God dwelt! Nor does Elias now cover his face as upon Horeb. Both of them have become strong to bear the near presence of the Eternal. They are so in Him who accompanies them, and who took them under the shadow of his wings.

II. "A bright cloud overshadowed them," and, "behold!" says the evangelist with growing wonder; for a new revelation is at hand, the sublimest moment is come. The heavenly messengers are with Jesus within the cloud, as in a sanctuary. The disciples, amazed at their own solitude, stand without. And now, to complete their astonishment, a voice is heard. It is not from heaven or from a distant height, but from the overshadowing cloud, and it speaks, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." It is the voice of Him "who is enthroned above the cherubim, and who clotheth himself with light as with a garment." It is the voice of the everlasting Father. He, of whom are all things, veils his majesty in a gracious cloud, clothes his almighty voice in human language, and in his own person testifies, in mortal hearing, of the Son of his Love. When saw ever the earth a greater wonder of glory and of grace? O the blessed realities of the holy mount! The visible presence of the Majesty of the invisible world in this dark valley of death! the sensible revelation of the King of Glory to the children of the dust!

This testimony on the holy mount is unspeakably precious and rich in meaning. First, it comprehends in a very few words the sum of the Old Testament, which is yea and amen in Christ Jesus. For the three parts of this divine proclamation embrace the three classes of Old Testament writings. "This is my Son," as from the book of Psalms, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee;" the addition, "in whom I am well pleased," is out of the prophets, namely, Isaiah xlii. The words, "hear ye him," you will find in the writings of Moses, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet of thy brethren like unto me: unto him ye shall hearken." Deut. xviii. 15. There is, moreover, in these words a reference to the three offices of our Lord. "This is my Son," brings before us Christ as a King. "In whom I am well pleased," points him out as the Mediator and High Priest, in whom God reconciles the world unto himself. "Hear ye him," represents him to us as that Prophet to whom we must hearken. Finally, this testimony throws light on the different relations of the Redeemer. What he is *by nature and in himself*, we learn from the voice, "This is my Son." What he is *for us*, is taught in the words, "In whom I am well pleased;" and what he is *in us*, is implied in the command, "Hear ye him." So full of meaning is this Divine sentence; nay, who is able to exhaust all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge which lie hid therein?

We already know the intention of this great testimony of the Father. Doubtless, its first reference was to the five witnesses of the transfiguration, before whom, as representatives of the visible and invisible Church, the God-Man Christ Jesus was here solemnly proclaimed the priestly Head of the new kingdom; and dominion over all things, and especially over the Church, purchased with his own blood, was formally consigned and ratified to Him by the Father. We know, moreover, that the declaration before us, like that at Jordan, had a reference also to the Saviour himself, and was designed to prepare and strengthen

him for his approaching sufferings. We think we can perceive, that after each great testimony of this kind, a new power appears in the Saviour, a new grace in his discourses, a new ardour in his words and actions, and an exalted fitness for conflict and victory. Yes, in his human nature, he increased in strength like his people, and drew it from the same inexhaustible fulness of the Spirit.

"This is my beloved Son." Thus speaks the Father, and the eyes of all angels and glorified saints attend the signal. The Father calls him his Son, in that peculiar and unfathomable sense, in which no one else in heaven or in earth may receive the name. By this appellation he raises him above all creatures; and shows him to be one in nature with himself. He declares him to be the brightness of his own glory, and the express image of his person. He presents him to us, as his own equal in power and glory, "in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily;" Him "who had life in himself," and whom all might justly honour, "even as they honour the Father." Happy are we to find our faith in the Deity of Christ thus supported, on the immoveable pillar of an immediate testimony from the "Excellent Glory." For every thing depends on the certainty of this article of our faith, "God manifest in the flesh." The whole Christian edifice stands or falls with this doctrine.

You know Paul calls this mystery "incontrovertibly great," and certainly it is so, in whatever way we consider it. It is great in its amazing contents, "God in man." Great in its mighty achievements, it has broken down a thousand strongholds of Satan, and prevailed over the gates of hell. Great, by its unexampled operation, it plants a new creation amid the old. Great, by its continued Divine power, it daily delivers fresh victims from the mouth of the Lion. Great in the majestic promise which is connected with it, for to this mystery every knee shall bow. But great above all other greatness is this mystery of godliness, on account of the glorious new facts and truths which it presents in itself to the eye of faith. For what

is it I see in the light of this truth, "God manifest in the flesh!" I see heaven opened, and the names of poor sinners written upon its mansions of bliss. I see this earth that was once Anathama, a seat of the curse; and now it is a residence of the glory of God, a scene of the greatest wonders of his love. I see a race of mortals allied, by brotherhood with Christ, to the eternal God. I find a God so near and apprehensible, that I can see him with my eyes, and handle him with these hands of mine. I see a Father's heart disclosed, of whose depths of mercy I had before no conception, and perceive a Partaker of humanity upon the throne of the universe, who is not ashamed to call us brethren, while the angels are but his ministers. The apostle calls this mystery of God "manifest in the flesh," "the pillar and ground of the truth." He means to teach, that without this article of faith, there is no gospel at all. The whole light and comfort of our religion rests on the basis of this truth. Deny that the man Christ Jesus is God, and you have trampled the gospel under foot, and reduced it to an empty and broken shell. The light of every cardinal point of faith is extinguished, and the tree of life is stripped of its leaves which are for the healing of the nations. There is an end to atonement, sacrifice for sin, merit to cover the guilt of man; for the blood of a mere creature, though the most glorious of all, has no virtue as a ransom for sin. Then Christ has but suffered for himself, triumphed for himself, wrought out a righteousness for himself; as a creature, and nothing more, he could not stand in the breach for a guilty world. No more can it be said, that he has abolished death, triumphed over hell, bruised the serpent's head; the precious doctrine of justification is now an idle dream, since the righteousness of Christ can be imputed to me, only upon condition that it was the righteousness of a perfect man, who was at the same time very God, and thus not subject in his own person to the law. Call him, if you will, the most exalted of teachers,—his wisdom will not reconcile me to God; call him the noblest

of martyrs, his sufferings did not remove the guilt of my sin; call him the most glorious of super-angelic spirits, he was under law to God as a creature, and his merits could not cover the transgressions of a world. The edifice of my hope is still in ruins; and, rather than preach a false hope to others, I should leave this place of teaching, and let who would preach another gospel in my stead. Justly does the apostle John set it down as the essential mark of one who is in the truth, "That he confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh." Whosoever denies and opposes this article of the Deity of Christ, has ceased to belong to the church of Christ. He has become its enemy; and as he is a partaker with antichrist in his sins, so shall he be in his plagues.

The Father calls the Lord Jesus "*his beloved Son.*" But who can fathom the depth of this expression, "*my beloved Son.*" This is a subject beyond our range, as what we call *love*, is no measure for Divine affection. And did we know the mutual love of glorified spirits, and of the highest seraphim, still this love of the Father would remain incomprehensible. Sooner may you learn from a drop of water the immensity of the ocean, or from a glimmering ray through the chink of a dungeon the form and magnitude of the sun! And this beloved Son he spared not for thee and me! Can you now see some glimpse of the meaning of the *so* in John iii. 16, where it is said, that "God *so* loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." Before this extent of love, all heaven is equally confounded with thee; and the highest angel is forced to exclaim, "O unfathomable depth!"

And who is it to whom the voice of the Father thus bears testimony? Is it not to Him, who, as the second Adam, stands as our representative and surety before God? And so this amazing depth of love is conveyed by this new and living channel to our souls also; and whoever abides in him, and keeps his commandments, abides in this love: even as the Son has kept the Father's commandments, and abides in his love.

The solemn declaration, "This is my beloved Son," is followed by the important testimony, "in whom I am well pleased." In these words, the Father declares him to be the object of his complacential love, as his own Eternal Son, the reflection of his own glory, and the possessor of his own adorable perfections. Still more distinctly, however, was this testimony borne to the Son as Mediator; and to that work which in the likeness of sinful flesh he was to accomplish, when he "finished transgression, and made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness." And as this glorious work was not for himself, but for those of whom he said "For their sakes I sanctify myself;" the divine testimony of approbation is extended in Christ to all his people. Hence this glory of the transfiguration becomes our own, if we are "in the Son" and "keep his commandments;" for his righteousness is then ours; and of us individually it may be said, as of the First-born among many brethren, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

"Hear ye him" is the end of this glorious proclamation from the cloud. Christ is the Truth, as well as the Way and the Life. Had he not come as a teacher into this ignorant and darkened world, what should we ever have known that was most worth knowing in heaven and on earth? We should have been like poor forsaken orphans, growing up in the depths of a forest solitude, and neither knowing who or where they were, or what was to become of them. We should have been forlorn wanderers in the valley of the shadow of death, raising many a sad cry only to be returned by the dull echo without an answer. No prophet should then have carried a torch before us; but we should have been led astray by every *ignis fatuus* of delusive hope. No apostle could have shewed us the path of life. For what are Moses, Isaiah, Daniel, and all the seers of old, but dark orbs, shining by the reflected brightness of the Light of the World? And what the apostles but humble satellites, which borrowed all their rays from a Central Sun? No doubt the size was not alike in all,

nor the power of receiving light. Some were, so to speak, moons in their first quarter, and others with half-enlightened phase, and others in full-orbed splendour. But all were but secondary luminaries, and the one light was the Sun of Righteousness, around whom they all revolved.

“Hear ye him.” It is a melancholy light which the need of such an admonition casts on our present moral condition. Think only, that to a race of beings that know not their right hand from their left, and who are wrapped in the night of death, a Person is sent who is as much at home beyond the stars as on this side of them, and who confirms his mission from above by proofs sufficient to astonish heaven and earth. Now, after this incomparably greatest of messengers has proved himself before all the world, by a long series of signs and wonders and mighty deeds, to bear the signature of the God of Truth, he addresses the children of darkness, “I will unveil to you heaven and hell; I will explain to you the mystery of your existence; I will teach you the true nature of God and man; I will unfold to you the remotest past, and the most distant future; I will shew you the way of peace, and direct you to the open gate of a new Paradise.” Should we not expect that the whole world would gather round this Teacher; and that, without any direct voice from heaven, the whole race of Adam should sit like Mary at his feet, or be ready with the language of Samuel, “Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.” But how very different is the fact! Nay, there has been no lack of docile pupils at the feet of seducing teachers, false prophets, and vain babblers; while in the church of the great Day-spring from on high, there has always been room to spare, up to the present hour. Not as if the evil lay in the want of evidence for his doctrine! it lies in the unspeakable depravity of the human heart. Not as though the gospel did not meet the necessity of human nature! It lies in this, that the deluded sinner neither knows nor cares to know his own most urgent necessities. Nor is it that the gospel is impossible to be understood. for in all that is essential it may be comprehended by a



child. It lies in the opposition which it makes to the sinful desires of the flesh and of the mind, which "love the darkness, rather than the light, because their deeds are evil." Neither is it that the Saviour imposes too heavy a yoke on man; for his yoke is easy and his burden is light. But the apostate creature, in its rebellion and pride, will not hear of any yoke at all; but only believe and practise what agrees with its own corrupted will. Is it then the fault of the light that it shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not?

"Hear ye him." How important and pregnant a testimony is this to the whole of the New Testament revelation, on every part of which it stamps the seal of infallibility! Every word, therefore, that proceeded out of the mouth of Jesus must be read by us as if we still heard the voice from the cloud sounding in our ears. When the Saviour says, "Without me, ye can do nothing;" and testifies, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me;" when he promises eternal life to those who believe on his name, and threatens the unbelieving with the wrath of God, and with an unquenchable fire prepared for the devil and his angels; forget not the voice of Majesty which still echoes from heaven, "Hear ye him." He then who refuses to hear the Son, refuses to hear the Father, and makes God a liar. But he "that hath received the testimony of Jesus, hath set to his seal that God is true." John iii. 33.

But what kind of hearing is it, which the Father here enjoins? It is the hearing of true and cordial faith; the most entire surrender of the heart and conscience to Jesus. For it stands for ever true, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." These words rise like a dark cloud over our heads, from which indeed there descends the genial rain and dew of heaven, but from which there also bursts the lightning and the thunder. Ah, my friends, it is no easy matter to

establish our hearts in the truth of this word of Scripture, if we look it full in the face, and feel its piercing energy ! Only think, there is a bloody cross, able to reconcile the whole world to God ; and yet those only are reconciled who believe. The sacrifice of the Redeemer extends immeasurably wide, and is sufficient to blot out the sins of *all* sinners of our race ; and yet he who is not clothed with Christ's righteousness abideth in death and perishes in his sins. And what is the number of those who are thus united to the Saviour ? Only one here and there ; while of the crowds of the unbelieving there is no number. Think of the millions of heathens, who have never heard the name of Jesus, much less believed in it ; and O ! how awful is the view of the truth, " He that believeth not shall be damned." Think of the many thousands of nominal Christians who leave this world of trial and opportunity with no better trust than in their own righteousness ; and O ! how sadly does the truth sound, " He that believeth not shall be damned." We think of dear friends whose natural virtues are great, and to whom our hearts are bound in tender affection. But one thing they lack ; they have not faith ; they are not members of Christ. Alas ; who can look upon them, and bear the thought, " The wrath of God abideth on them !" O, to stand by their dying beds, and feel the emotions of nature, and love, and gratitude, all striving against this doctrine of the word of God,—this is agony ! But the word of God cannot pass away, " Let God be true ; but every man a liar." The scripture reiterates its solemn alternative and takes no account of other conditions of pardon and safety. " He that believeth,—he that believeth—shall be saved," is its sole and emphatic doctrine ; and we must crucify every feeling of our nature that opposes the will of Him, who may justly condemn all to destruction, and who knows what are the best terms on which to offer and bestow his own free mercy. And, O, let this teach us the more deeply, brethren, that one thing is needful ; and though we should want all else, that we must have faith in Christ, or we are undone

for ever! There is only this command given us from the cloud, "Hear ye him;" but it includes all others; and without obedience to it, no self-chosen services of ours will save our souls from death. "This is his commandment," says the apostle John, "that we believe on him whom he hath sent, Jesus Christ."

So much, my brethren, by way of explanation of this most copious and deeply interesting passage. We find the apostles themselves referring to this important testimony of the Father to his Son, as one of the most powerful arguments of the truth of their doctrine. "We have not followed," says Peter, "cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Let this testimony, then, remain ever present to our faith. If you are looking for a pole-star, by which to guide your course amid the innumerable errors of the present unbelieving age, it shines on you from this testimony. Before this heavenly voice, all the clouds of doubt shall be chased away; all the barriers of infidelity shall be levelled, like the walls of Jericho, in the dust.

"There are," says Pascal, "two sorts of persons that deserve the name of men of understanding. Those who serve God with their whole heart, because they know him; and those who, because they know him not, seek him with their whole heart." He adds, "There are in the world, tried by a spiritual standard, three sorts of persons. The first serve God; they have found him: the second seek God; they have not yet found him: the third live without either serving or seeking him. The first sort are wise and happy; the last sort are unhappy and foolish; the second are wise, but not yet happy." "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." Amen.

## XII.—JESUS ONLY.

There are, through the mercy of God, many among us, my brethren, who bear in their own hearts the joyful assurance that they believe the gospel. We bless them in the name of the Lord! For, though faith be not the ground of hope,—which must be something without us,—it is the most characteristic mark of the children of God, the star and breast-plate of those who are kings and priests unto God. But how few are there among believers who know, in any just and comprehensive sense, *in whom* they have believed! This is much to be lamented; for the structure of their hope thus wants one of its strongest pillars.

Alas! it is not in the world only: but often in the midst of his own family, that the Saviour is comparatively unknown. That he is the *Saviour* is indeed confessed by all; and that is a great and decisive step. But from how great an extent of evils he delivers them, and by how glorious a system of means, many have no idea, far less a thorough knowledge and persuasion.

Many are the spiritual revolutions through which the Lord leads his people, ere they arrive at the height of perfect knowledge of Christ. Their knowledge grows with their necessities; the more the soul wants, the more does it discover in its Redeemer. And thus, at each new advance in knowledge, there follows a bound of progress in the spiritual life. The brighter the beam of the Sun of Righteousness above us, the fairer the expansion of the divine nature within us.

We find a deep expression in the mouth of the patriarch Job. In the midst of his sore trial of faith, we see him eagerly recurring to the glory of his days of prosperity, and rejoicing in the testimony of his conscience that he had walked before the Lord in the integrity of his heart. In this review we find him using the following striking language, “Then I said, I shall die in my nest, I shall multiply my days like the *sand*.” The word translated *sand*

more properly denotes that fabled bird, the *phœnix*, which was so often used in the East as a symbol of wisdom and moral truth. This bird was supposed to be immortal, and to rise from its own ashes and those of its nest in renewed youth and beauty. Job thus points to an ascending scale, a constant progression of life and happiness.

Now this figure of the patriarch's outward state is a striking image of the spiritual course of every believer. By nature he is the depraved child of a depraved race; alienated from the life of God, and sunk in actual sinfulness. He knows not Christ; for he has no need of his salvation. His cry is Peace! Peace! when there is no peace. Thus false ideas of God, and of himself, form the "nest" in which he thinks to die. But before he is aware, this refuge of lies is set on fire by the lightnings of divine justice and the flames of an awakened conscience. And now, under some sense of the evil of sin, and the necessity of a Saviour, but with a mistaken idea that he can only be saved by Christ upon condition of his own sincere obedience, he sets about building together a new nest, out of his own righteousness, which is no better than the former place of shelter. But from this refuge of lies he is also driven. He learns, by the grace of God, the vanity of his own efforts and resolutions; and in the fire of a deeper self-knowledge and contrition, this false shelter is also burnt up. And now a new man comes forth from the ashes of the old, rejoicing in the finished work of Another, and exercising that faith in him which is the sole means of enjoying his precious merits. But soon this faith becomes itself the ground of his confidence; and he has built, out of his own believing frames and experiences, another nest, which must, like the former, be reduced to ashes. And so his faith is assailed and overthrown by temptation; and his assurance of its existence is utterly lost. He seeks rest in this and that false expedient; but seeks it in vain. At last he makes the glorious discovery, that the ground of his hope lies not in his own faith, but in Christ alone; and that his finished work is at all times as open to his embrace

as a sinner, as it is to his appropriation as a saint. And now at last he has found a sure refuge, and his nest is in the rock; of which no fire of divine wrath or condemning conscience shall dispossess him more. Would that the refuges of lies, which are so common amongst us, were utterly destroyed by the hail and fire of a general conviction; and that the church of God would rise ever fairer out of its own ashes; and learn the glorious lesson of sacrificing all else to retain *Jesus only!*

MATTHEW xvii. 6—8.

“And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.”

Once more, and for the last time, we meet around the glorious scene on Tabor; and our hearts may well be saddened, as around the grave of a dear friend. For, through the power of faith to recall the dead to life, the Tishbite has become to us as one with whom we had lived for days and years in confiding intercourse. This, my friends, is the right use of imagination in the solemn matters of religion; it is to revoke what is fairest in the past, and to minister to faith in restoring it to us in the freshness of life. Henceforth the history of Elijah loses itself in that of One unspeakably greater than he; and he disappears a second time from the earth and entirely from the page of history. When he shall come again, the earth shall shine in heavenly glorification, as a “Bride adorned for her husband;” and all her countless hills and mountains shall be as Tabor. It remains for us to consider, I. The Impression which the Voice out of the Cloud made on the three Disciples; II. The Relief which Jesus gave to their Minds; and, III. The important Change in their Position after the Miracle of Transfiguration.

I. The solemnity and grandeur of the scene of transfiguration reached their height at the moment when the cloud overshadowed our Lord, and the glorious testimony of the

Father was heard from the midst of it, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased; Hear ye him." Up to this moment, the disciples had felt unspeakably blessed on the mount. But no sooner is their Lord and Master, under whose wing they had hitherto felt secure, enveloped in the cloud, and the voice from the excellent glory heard, not from some distant heaven, but at their very side, than their joy is at an end, and their rapture is changed into fear and awe. They fall on their faces as if thunderstruck, and are "sore afraid." Such are the feelings of nature; so awful is the approach of Eternal Majesty to the mind of the sinner! "Let not God speak with us," cried Israel at the foot of Sinai, "lest we die. For who is there, of all flesh, that hath heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire as we have, and lived?" "When I saw his face," says Daniel, "and heard the voice of his words, there remained no strength in me, for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I sank on my face to the ground." When Isaiah saw the glory of God, he broke forth with the cry of amazement and terror, "Wo is me, for I am undone! for I am a man of unclean lips!" And even the disciple whom Jesus loved, on beholding the unveiled glory of the King of kings, "fell at his feet as dead;" and the arm of Omnipotence was needed to uphold him from utterly sinking under it. Now, what is the meaning of this overwhelming terror of man in the immediate presence of God! Does it not betray the alienation of our nature from God! Yes, its deepest root is our own unbelief. For we are atheists at heart, and his coming has all the terror of surprise; we are sinners, and suddenly the Judge is at hand. It also grows out of our pride. We would fain be something in our own eyes, and in those of others: he unfolds his transcendent glory, and we sink into nothing. It arises, finally, from the very limitation of our sphere of vision and conception. We are accustomed to think chiefly of earthly things, and to shadow forth our scanty knowledge of things spiritual in poor images borrowed from the material world. Suddenly

an object forces itself upon us, high as heaven above our most exalted conceptions; and it threatens to burst the narrow chamber of our thought, and to tear the whole fabric of our ideas and notions out of its place, and break it to pieces. How natural, then, that our first emotion, at the view of the unveiled glories of the Godhead, should be one of amazement and terror!

But how could the disciples be so terrified; since they knew the Father, and put their trust in him, and possessed in Christ their Head such a fulness of glory, that they might easily have borne the loss of their own. It is true, my friends, that if self in them had been annihilated before the Eternal Majesty, they would have risen up only the more glorious in Jesus; but in a spiritual sense, as well as a corporeal one, Jesus was now behind the cloud. Their insight into his mediation was not yet so great as to enable them to stand erect in him before the Ancient of days. The triumphant language of faith, "Who is he that condemneth?" with its deep foundation and warrant, was yet far from them. And how shall they who have not yet learned the wondrous art of beholding and finding themselves in Christ alone, stand at last before the presence of the Eternal? The Lord God uttereth his voice, and the disciples lie prostrate in the dust. How easily can he lay low the strongest of the sons of the mighty! It needs but a word, and the cedar is broken—Lebanon and Carmel tremble. I often think how easily he could change in a moment the whole moral state of our world. Were he but to utter from above, in the hearing of all men, these words, "I am Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last," what a mighty revolution would it make at once on all human theories and opinions; what a new turn would it give to philosophy, to science, and to legislation! Every man's view and scheme of life would then be altered; the life itself of many millions totally revolutionized. The captive daughter of Zion would be set free; and the host of Satan bound with adamant chains. Well, this shall one day come to pass. "All the kindreds of the earth," saith the



Lord, "shall wail because of Him." But know that God our Saviour is a God "that hideth himself;" a God who will be found only of those who seek him. The fully-manifested God comes only to *judgment*.

"The voice of the Lord," says David, "is powerful; the voice of the Lord divideth the flames of fire." This it does wherever it reaches the sinner's ear. The voice is here—in this book! It sounds forth amid your cares and your pleasures, and your unhallowed engrossment with the present life. But ye perceive it not; and it passes over you without trace or result. But take care, ye that have Bibles in your houses, or Bible phrases in your memories! You are playing with a dangerous and awful force, that may any day explode to your unspeakable consternation! It is an easy thing for the Lord, at any moment, so to affect your ear that you shall hear, in the words of this book, his own voice, the voice of the Infinite Majesty; and hear it as if it came, not from a written scroll, but from the depths of the Eternal Throne. Then it is more than a prophet of Nazareth that tells you, "Except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." It is the Lord of the kingdom; and wo unto you, if ye are not "born again!" Then it is no longer the disciple Matthew from whom you receive the witness of Tabor, "Hear ye him." It is the Eternal God; and ye are despisers of his Son, and rebels! Then it is no more a Jewish lawgiver that threatens you, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." It is the Judge of all; and O, the words are words of thunder; and they strike your heart, for it is still "hard as the nether millstone!" Any day, the voice of the Lord may thus surprise you. And O, would that it did so; for how much better to be awaked out of the sleep of death, though it be by terror, than to be awaked out of it by that voice which all must hear, and which utters truly the words of eternal doom!

That which overpowered the disciples on the mount was, however, something more than the voice from the

cloud, and the unexpected approval of the Divine Majesty. In the testimony itself there was something awful, though it did not exactly contain any thing new. They had confessed Jesus as the Son of the living God, and seen his glory with the bodily eye. But upon this confirmation of his sonship from the mouth of the Eternal Father, their faith in him, as God manifest in flesh, rose suddenly to a distinctness, and clearness, and certainty, that overwhelmed by its awfulness, rather than cheered by its grace. Do not suppose that this is a singular experience of the disciples. The same would happen to yourselves in similar circumstances. You believe that the Babe of Bethlehem is the incarnate God. You believe it; and your faith of it makes you happy. But you see it only afar off, and through an attempered medium, so that your faith only animates your mind without overpowering your senses. But let the Lord withdraw the curtain through which the light of his gospel is so graciously softened to our feeble eye,—let him raise your faith to a degree of distinctness which is all but sight! and you would be overpowered, like that saint of God, who fell, at the lively thought of this mystery, in a swoon, and found relief in a flood of tears. The same holds true of our faith in the crucifixion of the Lord of glory! We know it by faith, and it gives us peace and joy; for the stupendous wonder it involves is seen in a softened light. Did we know it by sight, it would utterly crush and overwhelm our faculties. For these things are far too great and supernatural, that they should be let down to us otherwise than through a veil; for then they would fail of their gracious effect, and the treasure would burst the earthen vessels in pieces.

II. The disciples lie on the ground as dead, and dare not lift up their eyes so long as they feel that they are in the presence of the Eternal. But their Master again approaches them; and by him “every valley shall be exalted.” He is like a wise master-builder, among fragments and

ruins ; a compassionate High-priest, who preaches to the spirits in prison, and revives in the arms of his mercy those who have been stricken with the thunder of Divine Holiness.

“ And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.” Such was the touch with which he once revived his servant Daniel, and his apostle John ; a touch which doubtless imparted supernatural strength and confidence to their confounded minds. Thus he showed himself in all things the Prince of Life, the Sun of Righteousness with healing in his wings. You remember the poor woman mentioned in Matthew ix., and the language of her faith, “ If I may but touch his garment I shall be whole.” You know that her confidence was not put to shame. And such a touch of Christ, my friends, is the only means of healing our spiritual maladies. Do you ask how we may still approach him and enjoy this sacred contact ? It is by faith, by assurance, by devotion, and prayer. It cannot be described ; but the saints have all felt it. It is when their hearts are enlarged and their supplications flow forth freely, when the Saviour’s work is clear and glorious to the eye, his communion almost as if it were a bodily presence, and the exercise of the soul rather a free and living dialogue than a formal prayer. It is then that we touch the Prince of Life ! and virtue goes out of him and heals all our diseases.

III. No sooner had Jesus touched the terrified disciples, and spoken these encouraging words, “ Arise, and be not afraid,” than they are immediately loosed from their bonds, and a delightful peace again pervades their hearts. “ And when they had lifted up their eyes,” relates the evangelist, “ they saw no man, save Jesus only.” Moses and Elias have returned through the bright cloud to their home beyond the stars, to recount to their companions in glory the great things they had seen and heard in the holy mount. The Ancient of days, having given testimony to the Son of his love, dwells, as before, in inaccessible light, and amid

the praises of seraphim, that, with veiled faces, surround his throne. The holy angels have resumed their unceasing service, and strike their harps to a more lofty strain. The Divine lustre which rayed forth from the Lord of glory, and enlightened the darkness of the night, has retired behind the veil of his servants' form ; all upon the mount is once more as at the beginning, dark, solitary, and silent. The wind plays in the rustling foliage ; the stars twinkle silently through the clouds. But in the heart of this little assembly there is a change. The great High Priest, after his discourse with the heavenly embassy, looks more calmly forward to the bloody baptism that awaits him. The glorified messengers draw near with more of holy boldness to the throne of Majesty ; and the three disciples—how do they rejoice, more than ever, in the communion of their Lord and Master ! Yes ! however brief the moments which, in this vale of tears, we are permitted to spend on the mount, amid the unveiled glory of our King ; they are moments which we justly reckon among the best and happiest of our lives. Though they may only gleam for a twinkling upon our darkness, and sink again in night, they are not lost upon us ; there remains a blessing from them which follows us in our path, a fulness of invisible strength which is not soon exhausted, a light that braves the storm, and sheds, at least, a genial twilight over the gloom of our pilgrimage.

“ And when the disciples had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save *Jesus only*.” A striking image this of that state of mind which we call *evangelical*. Would that it were in my power to lead you all, from the manifold subjects of religious contemplation, to such a unity as this, and to concentrate all your scattered thoughts on Jesus ! So long as you have not attained to this, your faith is imperfect. You may be Christians, but you are not so in the full New Testament sense. You must learn to forget all your cares and distresses in Jesus, and to find all your joy and comfort in him. You must learn to look away from yourselves, and to look to the Lamb of God, and to

him only. If the thought of judgment alarm you, then remember that your Judge is also your Surety, and that, in the robe of his righteousness, you shall be "justified from all things." If the sense of remaining sin distress you, remember that the obedience of the Son of God is your security, and that the grace of his Spirit is all-sufficient. If the troubles of life afflict you, look not at the rocks and shallows, but to Him only "who holds the waters in the hollow of his hands." And fear not death: but rejoice in "life and immortality;" and, in your last trying hour, look to Him only "who will shew you the path of life," and who hath said, "I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am there ye may be also." In all these things, let the happy circumstances of the disciples on the mount be renewed in your experience. O the blessed and peaceful state of mind in which all that is seen by us is seen in Jesus, and in which we look not at the winds, not at the waves, not at ourselves, but at Jesus, and Jesus only!

Moses and Elias were gone; Jesus alone remained. This teaches us a sacred lesson of the all-sufficiency of Christ as our Redeemer. Too many so-called Christians see Moses and Jesus together. They are half slaves of the law, and half disciples of the gospel. But the Lord can put an end to this halting between two opinions; and by granting a deeper insight into the spirituality of the law and the carnality of our own nature, he brings the waverer over to entire dependance on the grace which is in Christ. And then, though Moses has disappeared, the works of the law, for the first time, come forth to light. The soul enters upon the blessedness of the children of God, and all the fountains of a holy life are opened. The law has lost all its terrors, and yet it is observed from love; the eye of faith sees Jesus only, and this view is enough to make the believer "run in the paths of his commandments."

"And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only." O the glorious images and visions which this scene calls up before the mind! Yes, in that

day, "when there shall be one Lord over all the earth; and his name shall be one," then that of which we have here a shadow shall be grandly fulfilled in all its reality. Man will then look above him and around him on all sides, and from whatever point he directs his view, will see Jesus, and Jesus only. The whole world shall then be a scene of transfiguration; nay, be itself transfigured. All shall bear his name written on their foreheads. Everywhere shall be seen his spirit, his lustre, his image. Humanity, like one royal diadem, shall reflect only the rays of his glory; while each renewed spirit, like a separate jewel, shall bear some special mark of his likeness. All shall be consecrated to his honour and restored to his service; all irradiated with his light and inspired with his life. Behold the forms and creations of art: and they glorify him only. Frequent the retreats of genius: and Jesus only is the fountain of its inspiration and the theme of its song. Turn aside to the schools of wisdom: and Jesus only is the principle and centre of all the sciences. In a word, all has been baptized into Christ: and has embraced Him as all in all. Jesus only in the government of the world; His word the only statute-book; His cross the symbol of every empire; His love the inviolable bond of all nations! O how my heart longs for the dawn of this day of glory! how all that is within me groaneth and travaileth in prayer that God would speed its coming! My joy is unspeakable and full of glory, when I embrace the thought, that death shall everywhere be swallowed up in the life of Christ; the night of sin in the sunshine of his beauty; and that no one shall be seen over all the earth but my Redeemer—my Immanuel alone!

My friends, the hour is come when we must part from the welcome company of Elijah the Tishbite. With his departure from the mount of Tabor, and the theatre of history, these Lectures naturally close. We bid him a hearty and reverential Farewell; only in the hope of a happier meeting in the city of our God. How much he

has grown upon our affections during the years of this our intercourse with him ! It almost seems as if we should feel a blank in our life, now that we must miss him from our peaceful Sabbath evening service. With none of the saints of old have we closer sympathy than with Elijah ; and if we may venture so to speak, he will be one of the first of the saints in glory towards whom our eyes shall be directed upon landing on the shores of immortality. And then may he sit down with us under the shades of paradise, and give us a deeper comment on his earthly history than we have been able to furnish ! And, yet, what shall we find after even he, amid the far echoes of angelic harps, has disclosed to us the course of his life below ? Elijah shall retire once more behind the cloud, and we shall see no one, save Jesus only, and his free grace.

We lift up our hearts to our God, and thank Him for any little edification and comfort that he has been pleased to vouchsafe us from the meditations which we now close. To his name be all the glory, if he has given his blessing to the weak and humble words which we have ventured to utter, in fear and in much trembling, on the life of one of the holiest and most distinguished of all his prophets. That the blessed name of Jesus might be magnified in your souls, was the aim that we set before us in all these discourses ; that you might be drawn by them to the Source of saving mercy, and feel that it was good to be there, was the wish of our heart which we have never ceased to cherish. O, that something more may come of it than empty wishes ! How rich our reward ! May the Almighty grant it in his grace, and confirm to us our delightful hope, that there may be not a few in our assembly, of whom, in a deep and sacred sense, it may this day be said, “ When they had lifted up their eyes, Moses and Elias were gone, and they saw no man, save Jesus only.” Amen.

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